MARITAL SEPARATION: EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY WORK

By

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this capacity has been a tireless advocate, devoted mentor, and friend. His prudent counsel will serve me well long after I have stopped work on this dissertation. Hernan Vera's teaching instilled me with a love of theory, and a belief that academic writing does not have to be dull and lifeless. Jaber Gubrium taught me how to truly hear rather than simply listen, and how to show what it is that I am hearing. In grounding the methodological structure that I use in my writing and research, Dr. Gubrium changed the way that I hear language in everyday life and so changed the world that I experience. Joe R. Feagin has been an exemplar of scholarly productivity and responsibility. I hope to emulate Dr. Feagin's ability to balance social activism with research, and to conduct research which has relevance beyond a strictly academic audience. Rodman Webb is also owed acknowledgment here. His infectious enthusiasm for discovery and his willingness to serve other scholars are the images that I call to mind when I occasionally lose the joy of academic work and yearn to run off and join the circus instead.

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MARITAL SEPARATION: EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY WORK

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Marital separation is an experience that is difficult to understand, both for those who are separated and for family researchers interested in the phenomenon of separation. There are few norms for appropriate behavior between separated spouses. At the same time, the state of being separated exposes an individual to potential stigma. Unlike marriage, which brings with it the new but easily understood self-concept of husband or wife, or divorce which returns a married person to the experience of being single, separation does not have a commonly understood status that people can use in making sense of the disruption they may be experiencing. This dissertation represents an effort to better understand how persons who are going through separation make sense of their experiences by examining separation narratives, or storied accounts, told by persons who are or have been separated. Three separation accounts are analyzed in depth both linguistically and thematically to show how individual accounts draw upon personal

circumstances and socially understood expectations to establish a preferred self which can be defended from negative assessment. These three accounts, together with seven others, are then analyzed to determine whether a more general typology of separated selves can be seen. Although each account is by nature unique, separated persons tend to construct one or more separated selves that can be identified as one of several possible types. The never married self requires that the teller claim that the marriage was never emotionally real. The still married self allows the teller to claim a married identity regardless of practical or legal status to the contrary. The contingent spouse identity leaves open possibility for reconciliation by outlining specific occurrences or conditions under which the marriage might continue. The enduring spouse identity requires that the teller establish a lengthy pattern of unrewarded effort both during the marriage and after separation. Finally, the compassionate ex identity permits the separated individual to cast him- or herself as noble and strong by focusing on forgiveness and avoiding lengthy expressions of anger or detailed descriptions of the partner's faults.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> For social scientists to make their lived research experience the centerpiece of an article is Improper, bordering on Gauche and Burdensome. I have not, I hope, ventured beyond Improper.
> – Laurel Richardson (1997, p. 147)

I am by nature a reader. When confronted with unfamiliar circumstance, it is my first inclination to grab a book and inform myself about my options. Usually this habit serves me well, as there seem to be books about every conceivable topic. Several years ago when my husband and I were having serious difficulties and decided to separate pending resolution of these issues, I sought a book on how to 'do' marital separation in a constructive manner. My major concerns were maintaining stability for my then-preschool aged daughter, and keeping lines of communication and interaction between my husband and myself open in the event that we decided to reconcile.

I was both surprised and dismayed by the results of my informal search. The self-help books I found on the topic either treated separation as a training ground for the newly single lifestyle, or as a danger period requiring professional intervention by a therapist who would guide the couple to the desired outcome. Generally even in this second scenario, the assumed outcome was divorce and the desired effect was a healthy transition to the new status of singlehood.

My husband and I muddled through with minimal intervention from professional sources and reconciled. However, during the time we spent apart it became obvious to us both that most outsiders who knew of our situation expected an eventual divorce. We were treated individually as less than married during our time apart; one of us was pursued by a suitor who thought it appropriate to make advances since we were no longer together in the traditional sense. Throughout the process we encountered varying support for either reconciliation or dissolution depending upon the context and audience. Regardless of the audience at hand, we almost universally encountered pressure for closure. Friends, family, and acquaintances familiar with our status seemed to want to place us as either actively reconciling or divorcing. They were most uncomfortable when we informed them that we did not know what the eventual outcome of our separation would be.

Theme of the Study

This personal circumstance sensitized me to issues of marital status and expectation during marital separation. I found myself wondering how competing expectations and definitions of marital status affected individuals experiencing separation. Two small incidents honed my focus on the topic, and provided the basis of the theme for this work.

First, I attended a child's birthday party with my daughter. While the children were gathered in a circle to watch the birthday child open packages, I sat in the back of the room next to another mother. We began making small talk and we were getting along well until something strange happened. She mentioned, abruptly to my ears, that her husband had left her a few months back. Surprise must have shown in my face because

she apologized for not making this clear earlier. She had referred to her "husband" several times during the conversation and spoke as though he were still with her, although he currently lives in another city. After disclosing that her husband was no longer with her, this mother mentioned to me that he still writes her e-mails telling her that she is the most important person in his world. This behavior, she suggested, was inappropriate. I felt very awkward and did not contribute more to this line of discussion because I felt that the setting was inappropriate and because as a sociologist interested in separation I felt it would be dishonest. However, I did wonder how this same woman in the span of ten to fifteen minutes could speak one minute as a married woman with a "husband" and then as a "separated" woman who did not wish to hear declarations of emotional intimacy from this same husband.

Secondly, I heard a snippet of a call-in therapy show on a local AM talk radio station. A caller phoned the show to ask about complications he was having with his girlfriend. During the call, the therapist asked the man about his eventual marital plans and he responded that he was still legally married to another woman. This answer made the therapist quite angry, and she insisted that he had no business dating while married. The man explained that he had been separated for more than three years and had had no contact with his wife during most of this time. Back and forth the argument went, with the therapist telling her caller that it did not "really matter" whether he had contact with his wife or not, and the caller insisting that he was not "really married" so his legal status should not count.

These two short scenarios illustrate a conundrum in many married people's everyday lives, one that current sociological research does not address fully or adequately. Spouses have expectations of one another as partners, and the concepts of "wife" and "husband" as culturally defined and personally understood inform these expectations. Similarly, ex-spouses have a means for framing their interaction – if children are present from the marriage, then they are co-parents and must continue to interact on that basis, but the spousal tie with all that it implies is severed. However, when spouses are separated but not yet divorced, the implicit guidelines for interaction are up for negotiation, and subject to uncertainties and conflicting expectations.

Even the most basic interactions cannot be taken for granted. Should spouses talk on the phone, and if so, how often? Should they see one another socially? Privately? What about physical affection and sexual contact, either with one another or with others? Is the separated person identifying as "mostly married" or "mostly divorced," and does this identification change dependent upon context?

Each of these questions has at its center the two main issues that I address in my dissertation: how do people in different circumstances understand their experience of marital separation, and how does this understanding inform their ongoing identity work of producing a self in this liminal time? It is my contention that neither "married" nor "separated" can be considered a uniform state of experience. The same respondent may, at turns in his or her narrative, present self as married, separated, or ex-spouse, contingent upon context or topic under consideration. To further complicate matters, the contextual embeddedness of the self requires that an individual's account verbally locate his or her

actions and motives in relation to the actions and motives of others, as well as external circumstances experienced In order to more fully understand the experience of marital separation, then, it is necessary to allow those who are experiencing it to frame these experiences in their own words. Furthermore, this research focuses on separation as a unique and distinct state, as opposed to a rest stop on the one-way road to divorce. To do otherwise, as is often found in the literature on this topic, is to assume a certain outcome and view data as evidence supporting this outcome.

Outline of the Study

This dissertation is organized around the narratives used by separated persons to understand and explain their experiences with the liminal state of separation. Chapter 2, "Marital Separation and the Self," reviews and critiques the sociological literature on marital separation from a social constructionist viewpoint. This is accomplished in a three step process. First, I provide a comprehensive overview of the separation literature published over the past twenty years. This literature is broken up into categories by subtopical focus. I then document several shortcomings in the literature, namely the tendency to treat separation as a subunit of divorce and the tendency for researchers to assume that separation is a distinct, concrete and unidirectional process with a finite and predictable end. Using literature on narrative and biographical work, I argue that full understanding of the process of separation is impossible without paying attention to the stories of separated persons. Taken from a constructionist perspective, marital separation is a particularly fertile ground for the continual production of the self or selves. By taking theory on narrative and self as the basis for a new direction of inquiry, marital separation

becomes an active process of individual experience and meaning-making. This stands in sharp contrast to the more traditional view that separation is a semantically outlined state where an individual waits for a new and externally-determined role definition. Finally, I review three major qualitative works that address the topic of marital disruption. I dovetail their various methods and findings to better hone the theoretical location of this work, and describe how this dissertation provides additional understanding about marital separation.

Chapter 3, "Methodology of the Narrative Study," details the research process. I describe how I obtained participants, the general characteristics of participants, and how the interviews were conducted. Following the qualitative dictum that the researcher is the instrument (see Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), I also detail unforseen difficulties in the research process that affected my progress in and feelings about this work. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a confessional tale, but rather to recognize the multiple layers of narrative inherent in this work as a whole. As I researcher, I collected stories to re-present as data, and in doing so amidst various obstacles and reactions the process of collection and analysis itself took on narrative dimensions for me as well.

In Chapter 4, "Storying the Separated Self," I present in-depth narrative analysis of three individual cases to show how these participants understand their separation experience and the ambiguous role that results from separation. By noting what overall themes guide narrative and by examining the linguistic devices used by participants in establishing claims, I attempt to show what sort of "self" or "selves" each of the three participants has chosen to use as a separated person.

Chapter 5, "Available Selves in Practice," is an attempt to explore whether there are basic "separated selves" that persons may draw from dependent upon fit with their own unique circumstances. In this chapter, I make comparisons across all participant narratives, in order to provide greater understanding of the fluid and contextually bound nature of the self in the midst of the separation experience. Here I combine the literature and my empirical materials to present a narrative theory of marital separation. I discuss how legal status no longer serves as a stable mooring for marital identity, and how competing claims of the meaning of the marriage and the married self are continually negotiated within a culturally informed and biographically constrained framework.

How my findings fit with and contribute to current understandings of marital separation is detailed in Chapter 6, "Discussion of Findings." In this section I also outline the limitations of the work, and suggest how future research might use participants' narrative practice to better inform both theoretical and practical understanding of the experience of separation.

CHAPTER 2
MARITAL SEPARATION AND THE SELF

> If I tell thirty students to write me a story about two married people who are considering divorce until something unforseen happens, they'll give me thirty wildly different stories, because they will have thirty different personal histories and sensibilities.
> – Anne Lamott, Bird By Bird (1994, p. 58)

This quote, re-written from the perspective of a sociologist interested in marital separation, might read: If I ask thirty social scientists to research why married people might consider divorce, twenty-five will find similar correlates using large data sets, two will say that it isn't their field of expertise, and three will actually go out and speak to people considering divorce to get an idea of how such deliberations occur. Such a tongue-in-cheek assessment might be funnier if it were not so accurate. In all but the last instance, the richness of individuals' "wildly different" stories of marital separation will be missed.

There is very little material on the lived experience of marital separation in the current sociological literature. Most of the literature is focused on predicting who will divorce, why they will divorce, and what the impact of said divorce will be on members of the family. In this chapter, I argue that the current focus of sociological literature on separation does not allow for a full understanding of the phenomenon of separation.

Instead, it generally locates separation as a relatively unimportant stopping place couples must enter in order to complete the process of breaking up.

To illustrate this lack and underscore its importance, I provide a comprehensive overview of twenty years of separation literature. By showing the themes and foci of the literature, I am able to present areas of inquiry that have been largely ignored. I then explain how narrative analysis literature and theories on the construction of self can contribute to an understanding of the individual experience of marital separation.

Separation Literature: 1980-1999

Teasing out which literature dealt with marital separation as opposed to divorce (with separation as a mere side note) was one of the more difficult aspects of this project. To that end, I limited my search to those pieces in the social science literature that had the word separation in the title. I further limited my search to the years 1980 through 1999. This span was chosen for two reasons: first, to take a large enough time span (roughly one generation's time) to get a picture of trends in modern marital separation, and second, for the sake of manageability.

Frequency of Marital Separation

A thorough survey of this literature shows that separation is quite common, perhaps just as common as divorce. One study found that the proportion of separated men and women, with few exceptions, equaled or exceeded the proportion of divorced persons in that same geographical area (McVey & Robinson, 1981). Unlike divorce, which leaves behind legal documentation and is therefore easily countable, separation may

be formal or informal and thus escape public record. Therefore it is possible that even generous estimates of separation frequency still underestimate this phenomenon.

According to Kitson (1985), a sizeable minority (one out of six) of couples can expect to separate at some point during a relationship. The separation picture becomes even more complex when we consider that couples who have undergone separation may be hard to identify for research purposes – they may still be separated, may have moved on to divorce, or may have reunited. Measures of the number of existing couples who have experienced separation are significant, suggesting that between ten percent (Wineberg & McCarthy, 1993) and sixteen percent (Kitson, 1985) of intact couples had experienced separation but were reunited at the time that they participated in social science research. Studies also show that the majority of those who have separated do not file for divorce. Of all couples who had experienced separation in their current marriage, only around eighteen percent had filed for divorce; more surprisingly, of those *still separated at the time of the research* only one-third had legally filed (ibid.).

Correlates of Marital Separation

Sociologists have generally paid more attention to the correlates of separation than to the correlates of separation *outcome*. A notable exception is Morgan (1988), who notes three types of separation: predivorce, reunite/temporary, and extended. Each of these types represents marital separation with a unique purpose. Predivorce separation is self-explanatory as the period of time between romantic breakup and formal legal divorce during which the couple is apart. A higher overall family income at the time of separation is associated with this type of separation. Reunite/temporary separation is

resolved with the couple getting back together at least temporarily. Those who reconcile after a period of separation are less likely to have completed education beyond the high school level than are those who experience other types of separation. Extended separation is unique in that it seems to be a resource for those who would otherwise divorce but do not have the resources to do so legally or whose religious beliefs make divorce an unacceptable option. Separated persons in this group tend to have lower overall family incomes and are more likely to be nonwhite than are persons who experience the other forms of separation.

Correlates of a couple's experiencing marital separation at some point during the relationship are widely varied but tend to mirror those of divorce. In this area of the separation literature there is a serious barrier to detailed analysis, however. A measure termed "marital dissolution," or the combined measure of marital separation and legal divorce, is often used. Therefore, subtle differences between separated and divorced persons are often lost, and those couples who separated and then reunited are often excluded from analysis.

With this caveat, then, the positive correlates of marital dissolution include higher scores on marital instability measures as well as overt expression of these measures (actions versus thoughts and feelings) (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1985), marriage before 20th birthday (Glenn & Supancic, 1984), residential mobility (ibid.), lower frequency of religious service attendance (ibid.; see also Thornton, 1985), and living in a larger city versus a rural area or small town (Glenn & Supancic, 1984).

Demographic factors also influence marital separation. Black persons, women, persons with low income, and parents of minor children are all more likely to report ever having separated from their partner (Kitson, 1985). Mental health of one's partner is also correlated to whether or not an individual reports having been separated, and these findings seem to support the selection theory that more stable individuals are more likely to become – and remain – married (Erbes & Hedderson, 1984). Marital dissolution rates are also correlated to religious affiliation, with the highest rates found among those who report no affiliation, followed by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews respectively (Glenn & Supancic, 1984).

Other correlations are not so straightforward. For example, the presence of an ill child in the home affects marital disruption but the direction of correlation depends on the type of medical problem experienced by the child (Joesch & Smith, 1997). Families with children who suffer from congenital heart disease, cerebral palsy, or blindness are more likely to experience marital disruption, while families with children who have learning disabilities, asthma, migraines, respiratory allergies, deformities, or loss of limbs or digits are less likely to experience disruption. A time-dependent relationship exists between birth weight and marital dissolution; risk of dissolution is negatively correlated with birth weight only if the birth occurs during the first two years of marriage.

The relationship between marital dissolution and attitudes towards dissolution is also surprising. Dissolution seems to positively influence attitudes towards dissolution, but attitudes regarding dissolution do not seem to affect the chances of separation or divorce for those couples who are still together (Thornton, 1985).

Adjustment After Separation

Studies of post-separation adjustment include both empirical studies of adjustment levels and discussions of adjustment therapies designed for implementation by family therapists. In both empirical and evaluative pieces, adjustment to separation is generally measured by the presence or absence of signs of emotional or psychological distress although specific measuring instruments vary.

Several factors have been found to affect adjustment to marital separation. Age seems to be negatively correlated with adjustment. Adults over the age of fifty experiencing more psychological symptoms and social disruption than adults in their forties, who score similarly to younger adults (Chiriboga, 1982).

Gender also affects adjustment in several ways. For instance, higher levels of childhood stress negatively affect adjustment in the extremely stressful initial stage of separation (Chiriboga, Catron, & Weiler, 1987). This relationship holds across sociodemographic groups, characteristics of spouses, and characteristics of separation circumstances. However, these findings are moderated by gender when specific components of adjustment are considered: for women, demographic factors such as age, education, number of children, and ethnicity significantly affect feelings of loneliness. At the same time, perceived childhood stress level is linked to feelings of being "out of place" for men more so than for women. These findings are even more striking when we consider that childhood stress as a general predictor of adjustment (i.e. all partners regardless of gender) was found to be insignificant regarding both loneliness and feeling

out of place: impact of childhood stress seems to be limited to "overt, socially linked behaviors rather than that of emotional responses to social conditions" (ibid., p. 166).

The temporal dimension of post-separation adjustment also seems to be dependent upon gender. Psychological distress measures such as neurasthenia (or severe general psychological distress) and vascular problems are higher for women in the pre-separation period, while in the post-separation period those measures of symptoms that show gender significant disparity (nine out of twenty areas) uniformly were experienced with greater frequency by men (Bloom & Caldwell, 1981; for a contrasting viewpoint see Erbes & Hedderson, 1984). Men also scored higher than women on measures of anxiety and neurasthenia post-separation, although there was no significance on the vascular problems index. The authors suggest that a longitudinal design is needed to adequately capture the gendered nature of adjustment to the separation process; cross-sectional designs will provide an incomplete picture due to the gendered differences in coping at various points during the adjustment process. This suggestion is furthered by the work of Waggener and Galassi (1993), who suggest that women tend to adjust better than men during the first six months post-separation, but who find that this positive variance decreases with increasing time post-separation. The gendered effects of timing continue during the transition from separation to divorce as well, with women experiencing greater emotional impact at the point of separation and men experiencing greater emotional stress at the finalization of divorce (Pledge, 1992).

Social support provides a significant buffer against many of the problems associated with marital separation, but is often less than adequate to meet the newly

separated person's needs. The newly separated person's perceptions of the separation will affect whether or not he or she seeks support, and what type of support is sought. During this extremely vulnerable period it is unfortunate and ironic that social support availability declines by a significant proportion of approximately forty percent (Rands, 1988; as cited in Buehler & Legg, 1993).

For newly single mothers, social support seems to be of critical importance. A direct positive relationship exists between technical support (such as attorney's visits and helpful books) and psychoemotional health for these women, while non-technical social support had an indirect buffering effect on the impact of stress (Buehler & Legg, 1993). Overall levels of support (global support measures) also proved protective against the effects of stressor pile-up (ibid.). Lower income single mothers tend to have smaller family networks than do married mothers of comparable socioeconomic status, and show more fluctuation in both friend and professional networks (Nelson, 1995). These women may expect less from their networks however, and it is possible that impact of support or lack thereof is related to expectation. This possibility is suggested by the fact that there is no significant difference in satisfaction with the social support received between the married and single samples in this research (ibid.).

Ethnicity also affects the level of social support received. One Canadian study found that parents of Italian decent have larger social networks at three points during the separation process (pre-separation, separation, post-separation) than did the general sample (D'Abate, 1993). Interestingly, the stigma against separation found in Italian families was not shown to be related to support of separated family members. The author

suggests several potential explanations for this finding: many of the Italian participants in the sample had experienced more than one separation, which may have satisfied their families that the union was not repairable; also, the definition of "family" itself within this subsample may have stretched the boundaries of family support, as participants counted persons such as siblings and brothers-in-law as supportive but birth parents and parents-in-law as unsupportive and problematic especially during the post-separation period. Further research on the role of ethnicity and social support shows that Chicana women are more likely to use both private and social coping activities in the adjustment process than are either Mexicana or non-Latina white women (Parra, Arkowitz, Hannah, & Vasquez, 1995).

Psychological adjustment to separation is also framed by participants' understandings of the circumstances of the breakup. Separated people are more likely to attribute the cause of the breakup to their partner rather than to themselves, although initiators of breakups attributed the cause of the breakup to themselves significantly more frequently than did non-initiators (Fletcher, 1983). Attribution in these cases tended to be "dispositional rather than episodic," or related to the other person generally rather than to a specific occurrence or event (p. 256). Attributional thinking is affected by expectations regarding the outcome of an event, with people who believe that they can affect the outcome taking a more active coping role (Pledge, 1992). Therefore, attributional thinking (or "the other person caused this") suggests an assumed lack of influence over events. It has been suggested that this form of thinking stands at one end of a bipolar

mode of thought, and precludes other types of more constructive thought involving present coping and future plans (Multon, 1993).

Again, a longitudinal design or a sample of persons experiencing different points of separation seems to be needed to capture the full picture of the separation experience. As thought is intricately linked to coping and adjustment, and individuals' cognitive assessment of and reaction to the separation change over time (Pledge, 1992), failure to include persons at different points in this process represents a potentially serious omission of data.

Impact of Separation on Parents and Children

Marital separation involves all individuals in a family unit, not just the partners experiencing separation firsthand. Research on the topic of separation commonly examines the effects of separation on the parent-child relationship; in light of all of the research being done on the effects of divorce on children, this emphasis hardly seems surprising. Parental separation does seem to affect the parent-child relationship over time, with children's evaluations of this relationship more negative post-separation than pre-separation (Hoffman & Ledford, 1995). This relationship does seem to recover over time. However, the study in question uses adult children of divorce (ACDs) as respondents. The increase in positive relationship interaction at the time of questioning versus directly after separation (ibid.) may be a factor of either increased maturity and adult identification with separated parents, or selective memory of childhood reactions, or both.

Parent-child relationships after separation are also gendered. A positive relationship with one parent contributed to a lower evaluation of the other parent, and

ACDs of both sexes report more positive relationships with mothers than with fathers at all points during the separation process (ibid.). Because mothers typically receive custody of minor children, these findings support the hypothesis of mothers as primary parent and "gatekeeper" to the post-separation father/child relationship (see Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994; Buehler & Trotter, 1990). Not surprisingly, when fathers are the primary parent and live with their biological children only (without the presence of stepchildren), they report greater benefits related to parenting than do those fathers without resident children in the home (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994).

Fathers without custody describe parenting as interesting, appreciated, sociable, and well done (ibid.). At the same time, these fathers seem to drastically reduce contact with children post-separation (Seltzer, 1991). Only one quarter of children see their fathers weekly after separation, while another sixty percent see their fathers a few times or less per year and thirty percent did not see their fathers at all in the previous year. Seltzer notes that there is a significant relationship between visitation and payment of child support, with fathers who maintain contact more likely to pay support. The nature of the separation also plays a role. Fathers experiencing marital separation as opposed to nonmarital cohabiting separation seem more likely to stay involved. Fathers of children born outside of marriage are less involved with these children post-separation on all dimensions (visiting, making decisions, payment of support) (ibid.).

Fathers who have custody may also act as gatekeepers; some seem to attempt to reduce mothers' contact with children (Greif, 1995). Adjustment to single parenthood seems to be easier for dads who seek rather than merely accept custody (ibid.). Still,

overall adjustment rates seem to be quite high, with custodial fathers' rates similar to married fathers. Anxiety and depression levels of custodial fathers are also lower than those of noncustodial fathers. These men may be a unique sample of fathers, however. According to Greif, fathers generally perceive a pro-mother bias in the court system and go to court to seek custody only if they believe they will win. Therefore, a sample of custodial fathers is likely to include fathers who are more committed to or comfortable with parenting than the average noncustodial father.

Whether the children live with their mother or father after marital separation, they represent a link between former spouses that cannot be severed by divorce. Coparenting a child is the key to continued interaction of spouses post-separation (Keshet, 1980). Separated spouses tend to withdraw expressions of caring and sexual intimacy, and maintain or even increase interpersonal distance by focusing on the coparenting relationship (ibid.).

Children's relationships with grandparents are not affected as much as one might expect. Overall, most grandparent-grandchild relationships are unaffected by marital separation, with forty-two percent of grandparents increasing the number of visits, forty-seven percent making no change in the frequency of visiting, and only ten percent decreasing the number of visits (Gladstone, 1988). The amount of post-separation contact with grandchildren was negatively correlated with the amount of distance between grandmothers' residence and children's residence, and was also affected by whether the grandchild was in the custody of the grandmother's child or child-in-law. These findings are limited, however, by characteristics of the sample. Only seven percent of

grandmothers who participated in the study did not live with their children so covariance among variables is probable.

For children experiencing parents' separation, it is not only relationships with adults that are disrupted. Separation also affects children's self-perceptions and emotions. Many children experience a period of self-blame. This feeling may continue for an extended period of time; one third of children between six and twelve years old feel some self-blame six months post separation, and approximately twenty percent continue to feel self-blame after one year (Healy, Stewart, & Copeland, 1993). Self-blame is not affected by parental disputes over parenting, other emotional problems of children, or academic problems. However, parents who involve children in triadic relations, or three-way communication that presses children to pass information and messages in a show of loyalty, significantly positively affect a child's self-blame (ibid.).

Self-blame, in turn, results in physiological symptoms including loss of appetite and headaches, and psychological effects including bad dreams and lowered sense of self-competence (ibid.). Additional research complicates the picture presented by Healy et al. (1993), as the tone of parents' post-separation interaction has been shown to affect children's social competence (Buehler & Trotter, 1990). Both studies find that parental competition affects children negatively, although Buehler and Trotter find significance with nonresident parents perceptions of children's antisocial behavior but not resident parents' perceptions. Buehler and Trotter also find that coparental conflict or cooperation have no significant effect on the resident parent's perception of children's dependency, productivity, or aggression.

How the emotional impact of parental separation affects children academically is still somewhat unclear. Parental separation has a significant effect on children's academic self-concept but not on their academic performance (Smith, 1990). This effect was similar for children of both genders, and was not related to the lack of an adult male role model. Further research on academic progress separates different aspects of academic performance, shows that parental separation has a significant negative effect on self-reported grades but not achievement test scores (Smith, 1995). The effect on grades is related to timing of separation and the race of the child, with a significant effect for white children only if separation occurs after second grade and for black children only if separation occurs before kindergarten. Family structure may have affected these results, however, as stepfather-mother families were included in the sample of separated families as it was reasoned that the child's biological parents were not still together. This inclusion may minimize the effects of parental separation related to living in a single-parent household.

Family structure transition, or the separation and remarriage of a parent, has not been shown to be detrimental to a child's overall emotional well-being (Baydar, 1988). This study is unusual in that it contradicts several findings regarding children of divorce: there is no evidence here that mothers' custody of sons is problematic, no evidence that amount of time a child spends with his or her father is related to emotional problems, and no evidence that negative emotional effects are stronger earlier in the separation (ibid.). Age at parents' separation is only significant in a minority of emotional indicators, and black children are slightly less effected by family structure change.

Reuniting after Marital Separation

Not all married couples who separate will go on to divorce. In fact, separation threats or actual physical separation may be used as a control tactic by some spouses, and is indicative of dysfunction but not a permanent severing of the marital relationship (Argles, 1984).

Even for those spouses who are separating for other purposes, separation is often temporary. In one study, forty-four percent of separated women in the research sample had attempted reconciliation (Wineberg, 1996). Whether or not a separated woman will attempt reconciliation is dependent upon both demographic and situational factors (ibid.). Those women who have children at home, who have a lower level of education, and whose husbands had been married before were more likely to reconcile. Also, younger women were more likely overall to reconcile, with the vast majority (eighty percent) of women reconciling within the first six months of separation. Separations that occur within the first two years of marriage are also more likely to be temporary.

Reconciliation itself may or may not be permanent. Many couples go through a series of separations and reunions. Among currently separated, once-married women, a sizeable minority (forty percent of whites and thirty-one percent of blacks) had attempted a reconciliation (Wineberg & McCarthy, 1993). Of these separated and reconciled women, a majority of both black and white women (fifty-four and sixty percent respectively) had two reconciliations or more (ibid.).

Why the Conventional Literature is Insufficient

This overview of marital separation literature provides a great deal of facts and predictive information, but not as much topical clarity as might be hoped for. Unfortunately, the literature on this topic does not fit together well to provide a unified picture of either the experience or the effects of marital separation. The troubling tendency to group both separated and divorced respondents into the blanket category of "marital dissolution" is fairly common (for example, see Booth et al., 1985; Erbes & Hedderson, 1984; Glenn & Supancic, 1984; and Joesch & Smith, 1997). As has already been noted, this grouping makes it impossible to differentiate experiences unique to those who are separated. Also, as researchers have noted that the experience of separation is temporally bounded and changes at various points during the separation process, folding together a large group of people at vastly different stages in the process of "marital dissolution" does not give the all-inclusive view that researchers might wish for. Instead, this process likely downplays the prevalence of experiences and emotions at any one stage in the process.

How researchers choose their samples also skews the literature on separation. Couples who have reunited, or children whose parents have reunited, are generally not included in work on separation unless the topic being considered is reuniting after separation (see Healy et al., 1993). Also, the finding of a sample through court records of who has filed for a divorce indicates the assumption that all separated couples will eventually file for divorce, and that separation itself is essentially a subset of the divorce process (see Morgan, 1988; for a contrasting viewpoint, see White & Mika, 1983).

The confusions inherent in the body of separation literature stem, I believe, from a failure to look at basic assumptions about separation. It is my contention that research on *what* separation is from the perspective of the separated person should be explored. Participants' everyday experiences and understood meanings should be used to explore this phenomenon, rather than reifying "separation" as a unified category that imposes common meaning and connotes identical, predictable experience. Also, I believe that it is critical to recognize that the state of separation is a between place in an individual's social identity – one is not single, but one is not married exactly either.

The separation research fails to capture these nuances of experience in part because the vast majority of the research on this topic is quantitative. By definition, quantitative research attempts to categorize or "operationalize" not only demographic but experiential and emotional data about respondents. No one respondent is permitted a unique expression of self or life occurrence – and those who somehow persist in being unique with regards to the rest of the sample are commonly excluded as outliers. From the quantitative perspective, "separated" is a binary state; one either is or is not residing with one's spouse. The only pressing questions remaining are what caused the separation, how long will it continue, and how can the trauma of separation be mitigated? The notion that being separated may be as defining an experience as other life-altering events such as marriage, graduation, or the birth of a child, is forgotten. Still, just as getting married and having children bring about a change in self-perception, so may becoming separated. This is likely to be true whether or not the separation is permanent or leads to divorce, because

while a person is experiencing separation it is, for all practical purposes, their marital status (regardless of whether they are legally separated or not).

While there are probably commonalities across individual's experiences of separation, we cannot assume that separated equals not-married or even nearly-divorced for all participants. In fact, I argue that separation is a unique status that *inherently encourages* individuals to explore relational aspects of personal identity. Because the status of being separated lies between being fully married or divorced, it is possible for the separated person to emphasize either side of the separation coin depending upon context. For example, at a public venue or in more family-oriented company, one might speak of "my husband," as did the mother who spoke to me at the child's birthday party. However, one might speak of "my ex-husband" or "my soon-to-be-ex-husband" with other audiences who are less approving of the match or who are less concerned with traditional family structure. Conventional literature also fails to address that one has not a single spouse, but another individual capable of wearing many hats, some more attractive than others. It is reasonable, then, to assume that some aspects of married life or spouses' personalities might be more dear to us than others. It may be that "my husband" always brought me coffee in the mornings, while "my ex-husband" would never deign to wash even a single dish.

Separation is also complex and fascinating by virtue of having few societal norms to guide behavior. When two people get married, there are institutional expectations that help guide the couple in "doing" marriage in a proper, idealized manner: the two generally live together, engage in sexual relations, share emotional closeness, and so on (see Keshet,

1980). Deviation from these norms is usually taken as a sign that the union is experiencing trouble (i.e. sexual or emotional estrangement is setting in). Similarly, once divorced the couple may understand that these norms no longer apply and what was considered appropriate within marriage is now inappropriate outside of marriage (ibid.). But for the separated couple, legal marriage is still present. This may be especially problematic if the couple is unsure whether the separation will lead to divorce or reconciliation.

Storying the Self

Narrative analysis provides a valuable alternative for exploring marital separation. In narrative analysis, the researcher privileges the stories told by participants (Riessman, 1993). This allows for the participant's creativity and agency in constructing the self or selves relevant to the issue under consideration. As Riessman notes, there is no single way to perform narrative analysis, although there are commonalities. All narrative analysis uses talk as primary data. Unlike other forms of analysis of talk such as discourse analysis, narrative analysis keeps contextually cohesive parts of the tale together in order to preserve semantic linkages and the use of cultural and personal resources. Some narrative analysts set up elaborate coding strategies and templates prior to analysis as a basis for the recognition of story, while others work more intuitively and remain open to the story forms and themes that evolve from the data itself. Narrative analysis, like many other forms of qualitative research, may be conducted from a "top-down" or a "bottom-up" perspective.

My choice of narrative analysis as a method of inquiry is both theoretically and methodologically grounded. Because of the nature of my subject matter, participant uncertainty about the "proper" response is likely. Separation is a liminal state, lacking the guiding norms of either marriage or recaptured singlehood; it is a between status that is often seen as no status at all. The cultural and social markers of appropriate action for a separated individual are unclear.

Narrative analysis does not attempt to fight against this uncertainty. It was one of my goals in conducting these interviews to establish an open space for participants to relate as many aspects of the separated experience as possible, regardless of whether different aspects were in conflict or were not yet fully understood by participants themselves. As qualitative researchers have pointed out, narrative provides a way for an individual to not only report events and feelings, but to think out loud and actively make meaning of these events and feelings through the process of talk (Riessman, 1993; Richardson, 1997).

Allowing participants to story their experiences of marital separation provides data that would not otherwise be available. Since people use talk both to explain and to build understanding, narration allows the participant "endless possibilities for who we are and what we can be," (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000 p. 3), as understanding of the self is constantly evolving and requires constant contextually-bound communication to others. From this stance, narrative work is valuable in many areas of study, but especially so in cases where participants are experiencing ambiguity. Not only does narrative analysis allow for multiplicity of participant "selves" within a single interview, this method

encourages the speaker in both experimentation and fluidity of presentation. Participants can pick and choose among salient details, and insert them into the story where they make the most sense for the purpose of communicating different aspects of experience or self. These details and experiences become rhetorical tools. The individual drawing upon story as a means of presenting self is making choices of what to present, and when and how to present it, within the context of the interaction at hand. According to Richardson (1997, p 29), the study of narrative allows five means for apprehending the human experience of lived time: "the everyday; the autobiographical; the biographical; the cultural; and what I term the collective story." Although the individual speaking is choosing to portray a unified sense of self to the perceived audience, he or she is not drawing solely upon personal concerns. Narrative becomes identity as publicly realized. This identity is continually forged through a selective process of choosing appropriate and available resources to support and build story (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Richardson, 1997; Riessman, 1993).

The process of identity-in-formation visible through narrative is therefore inherently reflexive. There is no one moment when I "become" who I am, or who I wish for you to perceive me to be. Illustrations of events and insights serve as "datable moments" which "are explicit or implicit moments of recognition that the sense of self and its story has *already* taken a decisive turn . . ." (Eakin, 1999 p. 39, emphasis in the original) The process of both self-understanding and illustration can only be accomplished reflexively, in the self-conscious manner of building the self that was. The self as becoming or evolving is not yet available for interpretation through story. (ibid.)

Since the apprehension of self through narrative is a reflexive process of constructing a cohesive personal history for the purposes of merging past events with present contextual need, the self as constructed is subject to revision or even contradiction. When appropriate to the larger plot or theme of a given narrative, an individual may present seemingly disparate information without losing the unified sense of identity being forged. Instead, what emerges is a more three-dimensional sense of self; the "I" of my presentation contains multitudes, as the poet Whitman has suggested. An example of this fractal yet cohesive self-presentation can be found in Gullestad's (1996) work on autobiography in Norway. A male autobiographer in her sample tells a story of problematized masculinity. His father's guidance is noticeably missing, his female relatives tend to be patronizing of his efforts at becoming independent, and he notes fear and confusion relating to gender. It is tempting to categorize this narrative as one of failed efforts at gaining manhood. This view takes up only one aspect of identity, however. It is also possible to see the tale as one of a transition to manhood that is both failed and successful, as both a tale of loss and mastery (Bjerrum & Nielsen, 1999).

I felt that narrative analysis would be the method most useful for my purposes because it affords separated persons more room to portray the different and often confusing aspects of their experience. People are natural storytellers. Left to their own devices, many participants will veer outside of a stricter question format and "story" their responses whether or not questions are designed to elicit narrative. This is quite common when the event of interest is traumatic or difficult for the individual to understand, although these type of experiences may be difficult to speak about in an explicit and

temporally coherent manner (see Riessman, 1993). People seem to compulsively tell stories about difficult events in order to make them real and manageable, and to incorporate hardships into their overall biographical narrative. The elasticity of the story form is especially comforting when a more straightforward answer is impossible to give because the teller does not yet have a clear and succinct understanding of their circumstances, or of the "right" answer to give. Storying allows for continual revision and clarification. This may be especially valuable for people who are separated, as they are in an unclear circumstance that clashes with their previously coherent biographical work as spouses. The separated man or woman in essence does not only lose marital status privileges but is prevented from fully taking on a new status that would allow the reestablishment of a coherent self story. For example, if a hypothetical respondent who I will call Mary has been separated from her husband John for six months, she is no longer a wife per se. At the same time, she is prevented from fully embracing the aspects of this loss that would reestablish her new roles. She is not exactly a single mother, although she might function as one if she is the primary caretaker. She is not a divorcee, although she might choose to date in the fashion of one who is no longer married. Through the use of narrative, Mary would have greater flexibility in choosing how to present these ambiguities. Narrative allows Mary the chance to continually construct and revise a draft version of the document of self. She may note that she is *both* a single mother and a married mom at different points in her story, and describe when each of these circumstances comes into play.

Mary may choose to talk around the issues of motherhood and marital loss, however. She may not give me the story that I expect, or in fact the one that I request. This, too, is critical to my purposes. Narrative analysis encourages the speaker to present the story that needs telling in the moment, as defined *by the speaker* rather than the research instrument. Responses that seem to range far afield or veer off-topic are rich veins of data to be considered, not asides or verbal marginalia. This data can be fully explored by paying attention to both content and form of participant response. Through the analysis of story form, the researcher is able to take data and bracket the whats of self and action in order to focus on the hows of the production of meaning. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Neither stance is truly separated from the other; it is impossible to speak of meaning in talk without paying attention to what is being told, how it is being said, and what forms the context of the telling. In practice, analytic bracketing of story allows the researcher to take multiple focal positions regarding the same data. The result is a layered text which braids the threads of discursive meaning and context back together.

Truthfulness is not an issue here, nor is the content of story especially critical (Riessman, 1990). Stories that are not strictly factual, such as "fantasy narratives" that interject made up events or change experiential facts, are merely another set of tools used "to take control of" an aspect of life that the teller cannot fully express within the structure of truth (Rose, 1993 p.151). Even stories that do not intentionally mislead must be seen as positional. Two persons might use the same incident as illustration of two markedly different themes. The key issue, from the perspective of narrative analysis, is to understand why a particular story is being told in the form of its telling within the context

of the conversation (see Riessman, 1993). It is not a matter of focusing on the content of presentation alone. If Mary is describing to me why she feels like a single mother some days and not others, I need to pay attention to why she is choosing to tell me these stories rather than others that she could draw upon. Why is this story at hand, and why in the language being used?

Criticisms of the Narrative Form

Relying solely on talk as data may at first glance seem like a scientifically risky decision. Traditionally, social scientists have attempted to complement their main source of data with additional forms of inquiry that ostensibly focus upon the phenomenon of interest. Often a researcher will attempt to use widely varying means, such as supplementing interviews with observations and textual analysis of available records, in order to cast the broadest net possible. Any data gathered by these supplementary methods is then held up to the primary data, and the researcher checks findings across methods or data sources to see if the data all point to the same conclusions. If so, the researcher has successfully used "triangulation" of methods. This term suggests that the exact location and shape of a phenomenon can be understood if a researcher uses several modes of inquiry, and implies that to use only one main method is to fail to adequately locate the subject of interest.

Triangulation is not always possible, however. Using talk as data is invaluable when studying a topic that does not lend itself well to observation. For example, while I can observe divorce proceedings in a court of law, it is impossible for me to identify an appropriate time to watch a person "be" or "do" separated or divorced. Since my topic

specifically addresses individuals' experiences and understandings of separation, I must rely wholly upon talk in order to apprehend participants' interpretations. Any attempts at observing separation "in action" would inevitably lead me back to the analysis of talk. I would be forced to ask my participant about the meaning of his or her actions in order to determine which were specifically actions of the separated self, if, in fact, this self could be separated out from other aspects of identity and experience, and whether other mundane everyday tasks had changed in form or flavor since the separation occurred. My observational component would thus be a subset of the narrative form, providing a jumping-off place for discourse and story and in return receiving its meaning from these stories, rather than a separate source of data capable of validating my respondents' words.

This conundrum makes traditional research triangulation problematic for the purposes of my study. My inability to triangulate these findings does not mean that my analysis will be lacking in rigor, however, for several reasons. Triangulation as a method for safeguarding research rigor may be less effective than commonly assumed. The different methods used to supposedly cross-validate results may not be appropriately focused on the single phenomenon of interest. The "same domain" assumption required for triangulation may in fact be false (Richardson, 1997 p. 92). Thus, I am not necessarily more constrained in my ability to verify my findings than is another researcher who uses a different primary method.

Also, while I am not able to use triangulation per se in my work, there are alternative means for strengthening the persuasiveness of my findings. These means allow me a more complete view of my data, without forcing me to make assumptions about

domain and interpretation. One means is through maintaining a critical stance in relation to my data, a process Richardson (ibid.) terms "crystallization" and recommends as an alternative to more traditional techniques of triangulation. Her metaphor is not random; in a postmodern text, there are more than three sides to the issue under study. Each vantage point may show an incomplete, fractal view of the subject matter and no one side can be taken as the whole "truth" or even as a component of a whole truth. Instead, each facet shows those aspects of understanding available to the researcher or the reader who assumes a particular standpoint in relation to the data. Validity in the traditional sense is no longer the primary concern because the idea of glimpsing a whole truth from multiple sides is not possible. The search for deeper and more sophisticated understanding is privileged over the search for truth, leading to the paradox that ". . . we know more and doubt what we know." (ibid.) Narrative practice lends itself to such crystallization well, as it requires the teller to not only concentrate on content but also form. From the perspective of the narrative analyst, this allows separate but interconnected attention to be paid to both aspects:

> "Considering the self in terms of narrative practice allows us to analyze the relation between the *hows* and *whats* of storytelling; analysis centers on storytellers engaged in the work of constructing identities and on the circumstances of narration, respectively." (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000 p. 104, emphasis in the original)

Narrative analysis also permits the researcher to peel back the layers of meaning within a single account, with the result that one interview may provide its own support and validation. Riessman, (1993, p. 67) notes that this "coherence"forms a basis for scientific rigor. She draws from Agar and Hobbs' (1982) framework of three types of coherence:

global, or the underlying basic goals of the speaker; local, or the specific goal being attempted in a particular narrative; and themal, or patterns of recurrent themes within the text of the interview. According to Riessman (ibid.), so long as the researcher continually keeps in mind these three levels of coherence and cross-checks between them to ensure "thick" interpretation, the text will constrain the researcher from "ad hoc theorizing."

I further establish the relevance and validity of my work by grounding it in earlier work by qualitative family researchers. Below I will describe how the three qualitative studies that have most strongly informed this work methodologically and topically each represent a successive step in understanding how persons who are separating experience the process with regard to personal identity and the experience of self. I will identify how the three fit together, where each makes unique contributions to the field, and how these works taken in concert help pinpoint the need for a more narrowly focused in-depth consideration of the separated self.

Listening to the Separated: Three Qualitative Studies

In any relationship breakdown there are accounts of what happened. An account is much more than a factual reporting of events. Each account contains layers of meaning that, taken together, present an attempt at maintaining coherence within a chosen stance or focus. This form of storytelling is ubiquitous in conversation; it is from listening to accounts as a regular part of everyday talk that we get the saying that there are "three sides to any story, mine, yours, and the truth." Within the context of marital separation, accounts provide a way to explain the failure of a socially sanctioned relationship from the teller's perspective. The primary ingredients to an account, here exemplified as an account

of separation, are what occurred ("we fought," "and then one day he said . . ."). as well as an attribution of motive and responsibility for why such events occurred ("we never did learn to communicate," "she never listened").

The sociologist performing narrative analysis must attend to both content and form in talk, and must consider the contextual site of the story's production. Analyzing the different layers of meaning in accounts is both time- and page-consuming, which explains in part why there are so few scholarly journal articles about separation that focus upon spouses' accounts. The standard length of a paper in an academic sociology journal, between twenty and thirty pages, does not allow for a detailed treatment of so large a topic as separation.

There are several well-known scholarly books published on the subject that use participant talk as data, however. An early example is Weiss' (1975) *Marital Separation.* Although written before the qualitative Renaissance that has been going on for the past twenty or so years in the social sciences, Weiss' book treats the subject of separation in a manner that is reminiscent of both discourse and narrative analyses. Weiss acknowledges that in relating the story of separation, research participants are both giving information and relating their position within the separation:

> They develop an *account*, a history of the marital failure, a story of what their spouse did and what they did and what happened in consequence. Often the account focuses on a few significant events that dramatize what went wrong, or on a few themes that ran through the marriage; in addition it allocates blame among the self, the spouse, and any third parties who may have entered their lives, and so settles the moral issues of the separation. (Weiss, 1975 p. 15, emphasis in the original)

Weiss' work also touches upon the collaborative nature of personal identity within the context of marriage. A marriage that lasts more than a year or two, he suggests, provides so many common experiences and interactions that the presence of one's spouse affects the experience of self. Being married pervades all other areas of life. I grocery shop with an eye to what "we" eat, I adjust my leisure activities to what "we" like to do (or at least what you will not disapprove of). Thus, each partner becomes changed by the marital experience. The union itself moves out of the realm of "we" and becomes part of each individual partner: "Loss of the marriage may be experienced by us as akin to the loss of a limb." (p. 71). Marriage also constrains and directs identity through each partner's expectations of the other. Each spouse plays a certain role in the marriage and with respect to the other, and this identity is continually avowed and reinforced by the ongoing interaction within the union.

From these standpoints taken, the reader might infer that Weiss intends to investigate how the spouse verbally locates and contextualizes his or her self in relation to the partner and the marital experience. Weiss' treatment of participants' talk is too shallow for this form of analysis, however. While Weiss' book is valuable as an exhaustive primer of behaviors and emotional responses experienced in separation, it does not fulfill this early premise of attending to identity issues made visible in participants' narratives. Weiss does not ground this premise of his work to social theory on the self or interaction at all; oddly enough, he never cites the sociological grandfathers of identity, Mead and Goffman, even in his chapter titled "Separation and identity change" (p. 69). His research instead seeks to build theory about separation and self by drawing upon

psychological theories of attachment and separation popular at the time of his writing. These theories are then applied to participants' experiences as well as to earlier research on bereavement, loss, psychosocial distress, and marital disruption in several chapters that he terms "theoretical in nature" (p. xiii).

Although Weiss does not break down episodes of talk into stories for the express purpose of analyzing narrative, his work is informed by narrative structures and rules. For instance, he states that "certain themes tend to recur in accounts" (p. 16). Within the telling of the separation story, people tend to return to various thematic resources, including the idea that the marriage was a mistake and the separation a positive step in correcting an error. Most of the chapters consist of Weiss' commentary on themes and actions within separation, exemplified by chunks of participants' talk. The talk data is used as straightforward illustration; the form of the talk itself is not of interest to Weiss, although he does comment upon emotional states that can be inferred from speech.

The work is broken up into chapters that each take an area of potential impact of separation as their subject including emotional changes in separation, reactions to the loss of attachment, continuity of interaction between former spouses, reactions of kin, changes in friendships, effects on minor children, and practical concerns of separated persons such as legal matters and the return to dating. Each chapter uses snippets of participants' separation stories to illustrate how the separation experience has affected the area of life under scrutiny.

According to Weiss, a marriage in trouble presents the spouses with numerous, simultaneous challenges. Each partner is likely to feel isolated and saddened, although

they may be angry as well. The root "causes" of unhappiness and disruption include different life goals, a "chronic failing" perceived in the spouse (p. 17), infidelity, and lack of closeness. Other personal problems, such as sexual inadequacy or stinginess, are described as factoring in the decision to leave, but play only a supporting part in the breakup by contributing to arguments and discord that then bring about estrangement.

The marriage may founder along unhappily for some years, which only compounds the problems associated with leaving. The longer the marriage endures, the greater the potential doubts spouses may have regarding their own judgement; how foolish must they be to have made such an unfortunate match, and to have remained in it for so long? Another irony of the unhappy marriage is that partners may find being miserable but coupled easier and more comfortable than facing life after divorce. While spouses may not be able to stand the sight of one another, they have become accustomed to one another and as such have formed a psychological attachment that is painful to break..

Frequent small rejections and invalidations within the unhappy marriage chip away at the spouses' self-esteem. Bickering takes energy, as does maintaining the appearance that all is well to friends and family. By the time the couple separates, each is so worn down by the tiny barbs hurled by the other and by the constant effort of shoring up appearances, that the love they originally felt for the partner has dissipated. At the same time, the partners are not psychologically prepared to make informed decisions about new directions in life. The partners are being asked to re-work every aspect of daily living at precisely the point where their psychological reserves are drained.

These circumstances lead to a predictably messy outcome. All arenas of life have been shaped to some extent by the spouse's status as one part of a couple. Now, when he or she is least capable, great changes must be undertaken and life-altering decisions made. Going public with the news of separation is especially intimidating, as it initiates changes that are beyond the estranged spouse's control. Often, friends and family are deeply shocked to learn that the marriage has ended because the couple had maintained a united public front. As a result, the newly estranged spouse has no way of knowing for certain how others will react to the news of a breakup. Family relationships with kin may shift, especially if a spouse"s kin perceive that spouse to be somehow "to blame" for the breakup. Parenting responsibilities must be renegotiated if there are children in the home. Newly single persons may command less respect in a family, and may receive disdain or pity if not outright condemnation.

Nor are friends much of a comfort at this time. The estranged spouse is likely to have made friends with other married couples when she herself was married. These friends will "rally round" (p. 156) at first in an attempt to give sympathy, which changes the nature of a friendship from that between equals to a link between helpers and the helpless. As time goes by, help will be replaced with a variety of reactions, including fear, envy, curiosity, admiration, and envy. At this point, the separated person may become the repository for the fantasies and imaginings of married friends, each of whom think that the separated person is living "what *their* life would be like if they were single again" (p. 150). Friendships one had while married become laden with new expectations and difficulties.

The social network of the separated tends to shrink, as most of these pre-separation relationships will be allowed to fade away by both parties.

The relationships and rules that provided structure in the former married life now gone, life becomes open to seemingly endless possibilities for the newly separated. This tends to be overwhelming and thrilling by turns. Some separated persons will be distressed and anxious, while still others will experience a sense of euphoria. These emotional states may not remain fixed; the same person may experience a host of reactions ranging from loneliness and separation distress to giddiness and a sense of never having liked oneself better. The newly separated tend to engage in "obsessive review" (p. 78) about the relationship, in order to process the dizzying array of changes and emotional upheavals that have become part of everyday life.

Eventually, the spouses' separate lives settle once again into a routine. It is at this point, Weiss argues, that a sense of a temporally continuous identity returns:

> It becomes possible again to relate the present to the past and to see the present as moving consistently toward a desired future. The individual becomes once again the same person from day to day, just as was true before separation. Now, however, the individual is a different person from the one he or she was then. (p. 82)

Weiss' study was one of the first exhaustive analyses of what happens when partners decide to terminate a marriage. Prior to his work, most of the studies that dealt with marital disruption dealt with the causes and the aftermath rather than the impact of the process itself. With a lack of previous work to build from Weiss took an exploratory stance, and presented his findings based on content in his participants' stories. As a result, *Marital Separation* is packed so densely with material quoted from interviews that on

many pages there are fewer passages analyzing the responses than there are responses themselves. The product is informative but scattered as there is no unifying methodological or theoretical framework that strongly informs all parts of the book. Theory is confined to a few chapters that explicitly deal with emotional impacts of separation, and these chapters have contain few passages of narrative. Because theory is being built separately from the narrative passages Weiss uses, his research has a strongly journalistic feel.

It would be more than ten years before a sociologist would combine theory and empirical data in a thorough treatment of relationship breakdown. Diane Vaughan's (1986) book *Uncoupling: Turning Points in Intimate Relationships* builds from where Weiss' work left off. She cites Weiss only infrequently, which is surprising as her work parallels many of his earlier findings regarding the practical tasks people perform in moving away from a committed partnership. However, unlike Weiss, Vaughan uses a detailed dramaturgical framework as the basis for her analysis. By interviewing more than 100 participants and coding and re-coding their responses, she sets up a template of the "uncoupling" process that individuals use to move from a coupled identity to a newly single one.

In setting up her categories, she draws upon Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self to establish a foundation of motive for the temporally bound process of unmaking a relationship. Like Weiss, Vaughan looks at separation as a process that has clearly identifiable, if potentially overlapping, stages. However, Vaughan's process of uncoupling is less an individually experienced change as a social performance designed to

minimize the social stigma accompanying one's role. While Weiss focuses strongly on the emotional and practical impacts of separation on the spouses and family members, Vaughan does not highlight these aspects of the separated experience. Vaughan's analysis whittles down the individually experienced emotional aspects of separation in order to make the psychological impact "subservient to the sociological rhythms of the process" (Vaughan, 1986 p. 7).

According to Vaughan (1986), in any separation there are two positions: that of the initiator, who is the one to set the process in motion, and that of the partner, whose part in the drama of uncoupling is largely that of reaction to prompts set by the initiator. Each role has its attendant problems. In heterosexual unions, there is a strong social pressure to remain together. The person publicly identified as the initiator must avoid potential sanctioning as much as possible. The partner generally has greater access to sympathy, as he or she is not the one trying to break up a partnership. Due to social norms regarding sexuality, the sympathy accorded to each of these roles is reversed in the case of homosexual unions.

Uncoupling is presented as a temporally ordered and meticulously choreographed process with inconspicuous beginnings. One partner, the initiator, is unhappy with aspects of the relationship. The relationship does not fit with his or her sense of self, and discomfort results. As a result, the initiator takes steps to rectify this dissonance; he or she may take on new hobbies and friends in order to get validation for the preferred sense of self. At this point, the initiator does not make his or her unhappiness plain to the partner because the relationship still represents a large part of the initiator's social

structure, and because there are still positive aspects of the relationship that encourage the initiator to stay.

At some point in the process, however, the negatives begin to outweigh the positives in the initiator's mind. The initiator takes the chance of cuing the partner about issues and problems in the relationship, but does so in a manner that downplays their importance. While the initiator has taken the first step towards leaving the relationship, this may not be understood by either party. The initiator may be hoping to change the partner, and often makes gentle suggestions so as not to hurt the partner. The partner tends to misunderstand these proddings as either as everyday complaints related to a specific circumstance (i.e., "she is angry that I left my towel on the floor again") or as "normal" couple disagreements about personality issues ("we fight occasionally because I tend to be messy and she is a neat person"). In neither case does the partner see the resulting tensions as likely to cause the dissolution of the relationship.

Sooner or later, the initiator comes to realize that subtle cuing is not doing the job. The relationship still does not fit with his or her sense of self. There is also a process of "pushes and pulls" going on (p. 49); the new friends and activities pursued by the initiator feel more comfortable than do the old routines that involve the partner. The initiator has for some time been quietly exploring other options, listening to stories of others' separations, perhaps even checking out the feasibility of alternate living quarters and other practical considerations linked to the considered change. As the initiator begins to "construct a social location of their own" (p. 44) that includes both practical and social

alternatives to life with the partner, separation becomes more and more likely and the positive aspects of the relationship have less of a hold.

This cognitive switch is made easier by the initiator's redefinition of relationship history. Small annoyances are amplified, and the partner's positive qualities recast as either insignificant or unattractive. Where the partner might at first have been seen as easygoing and social, for example, the initiator may come to re-cast the partner's same behaviors as lazy and shallow. The initiator's caring feelings toward the partner diminish, and so efforts to protect the partner's feelings are replaced with strategies designed to end the relationship with as little social approbation as possible.

Thus, the "collaborative cover-up" (p. 76) that both partners have been constructing breaks down, and confrontation results. In some instances, the initiator may confront the partner directly and state the nature of the problems in the relationship. This is the most risky option, as it does not allow the initiator to shift or share the burden of responsibility for relationship breakdown. Indirect confrontation is more likely, and can be managed through one or more of the following three techniques. In the first, decreased interaction, the initiator's increasing avoidance of the partner forces the partner to ask what is wrong. Rule violation, where the initiator does something so extreme (infidelity, selling the family car) that it requires the partner to confront, may actually lead to the partner leaving and bearing the burden of blame. In the "fatal mistake" (p. 91), the partner either reacts to the initiator's increasingly poor behavior with a mistake of his or her own, or some negative trait of the partner's is invested with increasing importance by the initiator until it continually comes up and causes discord. Both of these fatal mistake

scenarios have the same result; the initiator uses the partner's mistake as a justifiable reason to break up the relationship.

Interestingly, exposing the festering discontents below the polite surface of the relationship tends to extend the life of the relationship somewhat. Confrontation tends to result in a period of negotiation. Both partners may try to change the relationship to maximize chances of success. Alternately, the partner may take up the task of relationship rescue by attempting to change him- or herself in response to criticism, and by swaying the partner's interests and social relationships away from those that make separation an attractive alternative.

Attempts at saving the relationship are generally unsuccessful for several reasons. First, there is a power differential being played out; the partners are not in the same place in the separating process. The initiator has been working for some time to establish a life outside of the relationship, which has become "real" by the time that the partner has enough information to effectively and openly address relationship problems. This new life continually underscores the root cause of a breakup, the initiator's unhappiness with the relationship. Reconciliations may result in a cycle of trying to improve the relationship and passively accepting that the relationship is inherently flawed, or may develop into an emotionally hollow pairing where the initiator is bodily present but emotionally absent. In either instance, the effort required to continue the relationship becomes exhausting and most couples do separate as a result.

Taking the breakup public is a matter of some delicacy, because observers tend to attribute fault. The telling of the breakup story therefore becomes a lobbying for approval.

Initiators will attempt to show that they did not blithely leave the relationship, but did so after great effort to fix insurmountable problems; if the problems can be cast as directly caused by the partner, so much the better. Partners will tell a different tale which features them as bewildered and wronged, and which attributes the breakup of the relationship to the initiator's unreasonable actions and expectations.

Both actors, initiator and partner, will seek out audiences likely to be sympathetic to their portrayal of the separation. This, in turn, becomes part of the inertia of the separation experience. By selectively relating their experiences, the actors have these portrayals reinforced. The relationship's demise becomes more and more likely. Both partners have had to work to convince their audiences that the relationship and the partner were inappropriate. At this point, reuniting would require the almost impossible task of revising this negative public perception:

> The partners are held to the path they have begun by what other people know. It is almost as if, in the absence of a formal uncoupling ritual, those who uncouple devise one of their own. Each person assembles a supportive community, whose witnesses view with interest the subsequent unfolding of events. Each person feels pressure to behave in a matter consistent with what these witnesses now expect. (Vaughan, 1986 p. 150)

Because Vaughan focuses on the mechanics of separation, her display of participants' actions and motives makes a more coherent whole than does Weiss' earlier work. Weiss jumps from one practical concern to another in ordering his analysis; the topics of legal matters, love and attachment, telling kin, and relationships with friends are each addressed in their own chapter. Vaughan addresses these same topics, but does not isolate them in individual chapters. Rather, she treats each as an aspect of a much larger unified process of breaking up rather than as separate areas of life impacted by relationship

loss. Vaughan's work is an improvement on Weiss' significant contribution to family sociology, as it shows not only what separated people do and feel during the process, but how these aspects of separation are socially informed and constrained.

While Vaughan's work furthers our knowledge of the separation process, it shares a major constraint found in Weiss' study. Both works assume that change in identity that accompanies separation is somewhat fixed. Although both authors describe the forging of a new self after separation as a variable process involving false starts and setbacks, each assumes that there are two identities in contest: that of a "married self" and that of a "non-married self." Change that occurs in one's identity during separation can be plotted back and forth along this linear continuum; one either clings to the married identity, or moves on with life leaving this identity behind. The dynamic nature of identity formation during separation is constrained by this preconception. Vaughan seemingly implies that identity in separation becomes layered, consisting of variable levels of married and non-married identity markers and objects, and that the ratio of married-to-not-married identity resources change as the process unfolds. Weiss, on the other hand, portrays the separated state as being either one of non-self or of lost self:

> They are, as it were, between selves. There are any number of ways they display this uncomfortable status. . . . Yet while they recognize fewer constraints, they also suffer from aimlessness that may express itself in inconsistency or impulsiveness or apathy. They have as yet no new coherent self in terms of which they can evaluate alternatives. (Weiss 1975 p. 70)

To be "between selves" here is to have cast off one self, that of spouse, without having found another self to take its place. How this is played out is difficult to determine, as Weiss suggests nearly in the same breath that there is a "true" self that can be actualized

after separation if it can only be found. He states, "with separation, there is no further need for pretending: it is possible to be one's self. But what self that is may now have become uncertain." (ibid. p. 70)

Unlike those found in Vaughan's work, Weiss' separated spouse is not actively trying to manage impressions in forging a new identity. Although there is the awareness of blame and stigma among Weiss' participants, their "new" selves seem to come as a by-product of remaking everyday life after their marriages end:

> One of the many ironies of marital separation is that the crisis of identity occurs when many decisions simply must be made: decisions about where to live, about legal steps, about how to relate to the former spouse, about how to reorganize one's life. As decisions are made, and steps taken to implement them, they contribute to a restructuring of the individual's identity. (ibid. p. 81)

Both Weiss and Vaughan also attempt to describe what happens during separation, and to varying extent why events occur as they do. In Vaughan especially, the analysis of separation conforms to a symbolic interactionist framework. Others' perceptions of the separation and the spouses involved is taken into account when participants explain their actions and motives. However, neither Weiss nor Vaughan attempt to get at how participants story their answers in certain ways, using both content and linguistic choices to flesh out the full meaning of their accounts. Vaughan comes closest to meeting this goal, as she acknowledges that "talk, after all, is behavior." (p. 202) She notes both emotional tone and overall form of talk ("stability, conciseness, length, and coherence," ibid.). The finer points of linguistic form are overlooked; she does not look at the linguistic and metaphoric layers of meaning that her participants establish in their accounts. This is not a shortcoming of the work. Vaughan never intended to take the

individual experience of separation as her subject, preferring instead to showcase the social context that guides and constrains separation as a process.

Catherine Kohler Riessman's *Divorce Talk: Women and Men Make Sense of Personal Relationships* (1990) provides the closer look at the experience of marital discord that is missing in Vaughan's book. Like Vaughan, Riessman attends to the social context of the production of accounts. Her analysis bridges this more predictable process with private experience: "This study links the social and public issues of divorce with the personal and private experience of divorce." (p. 7) By focusing on participants' talk not only in relation to content and form, but also with an ear for linguistic and rhetorical devices employed, Riessman delves into individuals' particular meanings within an account.

This standpoint is unique. As Riessman suggests, "researchers assume that individuals mean the same thing when they identify a particular complaint – such as emotional unavailability, drinking, or an extramarital affair." (p. 11) This approach to breakup accounts, that complaints should be taken at face value and analyzed to provide a picture of cause and effect, decontextualizes the personal and lived experience of marital separation. Each individual is experiencing marital breakdown within a local framework of biographical experiences and social contexts; one separation cannot be taken as exchangeable with any other.

This does not mean that more general conclusions about separation cannot be made. Although each person interprets separation and divorce in their own way, they all are avoiding a "spoiled identity" that can result from becoming divorced (p. 14).

Riessman, in recognizing this duality of experience, makes a unique contribution to the field of family sociology by studying *both* individual accounts of separation using narrative analysis and patterns found across multiple accounts using more general "qualitative analysis" (p. 16).

Throughout the work, Riessman establishes the gendered nature of the divorce experience. Men and women do not make sense of this event in the same way, as they have different expectations in marriage, different experiences of marriage itself, and different cultural scripts to draw from in times of hardship. It is hardly surprising, then, that gender pervades speakers' accounts. Gender serves a reciprocal purpose in divorce accounts; it becomes both an impetus for trouble in the marriage and a means for explaining this trouble. The "ideology of the companionate marriage," in which partners expect to be one another"s closest emotional relationship and yet retain gendered roles within the relationship, is central to most divorce accounts (p. 24). Problems arise when each partner defines emotional closeness and appropriate behavior differently. Women tend to want tacit understanding, verbal expressions of affection, and shared leisure activities. Men, on the other hand, want the emotional exclusivity of their wives, which causes problems because wives also have continuing bonds with kin and responsibilities to children. Reciprocity, from the male perspective, does not involve emotional give-and-take. Men expect emotional support from wives in exchange for financial support. Their emotional closeness in marriage is often expressed sexually. Unfortunately, an unhappy wife who has not received her version of emotional validation is unlikely to engage in sexual behavior. Both partners end up lonely and emotionally dissatisfied as a result.

The gendered expectations of each spouse are so misaligned because they do not share meanings for even such basic concepts as "leisure," "sex," and "home." For men, the daily experience of work leaves them with the desire to escape the rat race by relaxing at home with an emotionally and sexually available spouse. Hobbies, on the other hand, tend to involve "guy" activities and exclude wives either outright ("the guys" are going fishing) or indirectly (she is invited to the baseball game, but does not like baseball and so declines). This dual set of expectations isolates wives emotionally, with poorer women complaining more frequently about the gendered nature of leisure activities. For wives, home is not a refuge but a place that must be constantly cleaned and tended to, even if the wife works outside the home. Leisure requires doing something with the spouse, preferably away from the house. When a man wants to spend spousal time in the house, and then fun time away from both home and wife, wives may become angry and frustrated.

One major way that women wield power in the relationship is by controlling the frequency of sex. Ironically, this exercise tends to push the relationship further on the road from failing to unnameable:

> It is not surprising in this context that a number of women comment on the decline in frequency of sex as the marriage becomes emotionally strained. Paradoxically, the absence of sex then becomes a justification for ending the marriage. (p. 35)

Women control sexual frequency in a marriage in part because there are few other options open to them for the exercise of power. Generally they do not have economic power. Even if they make more than their husbands, this circumstance brings its own problems. Women become bitter when their husbands reject the role of breadwinner,

either by not working or by taking less demanding jobs than their wives hold, while the men themselves feel devalued. Exercise of any power women gain by making more money than their spouse is understandably problematic. Neither is their ownership of the domestic arena of life a way for them to express dissatisfaction. Women's domestic work is alternately devalued as insignificant and controlled by husbands, who may comment on the quality and appropriateness of the work. Instead of providing a means for control within the marital relationship, then, housework becomes a lose-lose proposition. Women seem aware of this double oppression: if I iron your shirts and cook your supper, it is business as usual and I receive no appreciation for my efforts. But, if I go on strike and you end up eating frozen dinners over the sink while wearing a mismatched pair of dirty socks, I am a bad wife and subject to your censure. Women also tell stories of physical abuse and economic control by husbands. Both genders complain of sexual infidelity, but with varying intensity and different reasoning. Women see husbands' sexual infidelity as indicating a character flaw. Husbands who cheat cannot trusted because they have been "giving away their love" to another woman, compounding physical cheating with emotional betrayal (p. 34). Interestingly, husbands of cheating wives seem to belong to one of three camps. Either they dismiss the behavior as unimportant within the relationship, minimize the importance of the behavior as being a symptom rather than a cause of marital breakdown, or express extreme jealousy and distress over any real or imagined betrayals.

. Considering the minefield of gendered expectations, power imbalances, and potential miscommunications in marriage, perhaps it should be considered shocking that so

many marriages do *not* end in divorce. Likely this is due to social expectations, as divorce accounts tend to play against these expectations as a means of providing a justifiable basis for terminating the union.

Riessman explains that in every divorce account the speaker must confront the "teller's problem" (p. 74) of building a rhetorically effective and thematically coherent reason for the failure of the marriage. Each speaker must validate his or her actions in the relationship, and build a story that tells why "I was right to *do* what I did." (p. 78, emphasis in the original) An account is inextricably bound to the background and lived experience of the teller, but is informed by the speaker's knowledge of social expectations regarding the subject of talk. This intersection of the public and the private results in speakers' selective use of certain story elements and modes of representation as part of a collaborative account between teller and audience. The marital experiences are privately experienced, but publicly *used* in talk in response to social expectations.

Analysis that takes narrative as its subject requires that both the public and private aspects of meaning be considered. Riessman teases meaning out of the personal elements of talk, which she terms "genre" and which include "specific conventions and codes of speech, including verb tense, temporality, sequencing, discourse markers, and other linguistic elements." (p. 77) These elements of genre are then considered in light of the context and content of talk, in order to more fully describe the meaning being constructed in the telling of the story.

In the within-case section where Riessman uses narrative analysis, there are not traditional research findings about divorce; these segments illustrate how each person's

relationship story is structured to justify the outcome of divorce. Traditional "complaints" about marriage, such as infidelity or spousal violence, take on individual meaning as they are rhetorically used in building the account of marital breakdown:

> The close analysis of particular accounts reveals how a theme – like physical violence or marital infidelity – is an active force, not a static category. . . . Nor are the events themselves – however terrible – always the "cause" of the divorce, as Tessa and Al make clear. (p. 116-117)

While Riessman does not attempt to establish a commonality of meaning across accounts in this section of her analysis, she does establish forms of narrative that recur in participants' talk. Each form seems to serve a different rhetorical purpose, as illustrated in commonalities of usage context across narratives.

The first genre of narrative, story, provides concrete illustrations to bolster claims being made by a speaker. The story form is the "classic genre" of narrative, which is a retelling of an event to make a specific, and often moral, point (p. 79). Stories tend to have a specific form of abstract, orientation (who, what, where, and when), basic plot and tone (what happened, how it was understood at the time), resolution, and ending talk that signifies a return to the current conversational sphere (see also Labov, 1972).

The habitual narrative can be identified by the use of words and phrases that indicate common occurrence. A participant that uses phrases like "she would," "I'd," or "he used to" in prefacing an instance is drawing upon the habitual narrative. Each instance described is "not unique to a particular moment in time but instead stand[s] for classes of events that happen over and over again." (p. 84) The habitual narrative turns a segment of story into more than a way to describe recurring events, however. Each tale becomes a mini character sketch, drawing the listener into making moral and practical judgements

about the actor being described. If a husband tells a story of his wife's having come home very late one evening, with the result that everyone was worried and the family did not have hot dinner, this is a single – and potentially excusable – instance of thoughtlessness. If that same story is told within the structure of the habitual narrative, the wife is cast as the *type* of person who puts her own concerns above her family.

Hypothetical narratives are a way for the teller to juxtapose the ideal and the actual in relating a story: they "present a vision of how it might have been." (p. 118) This form of narrative uses the subjunctive tense, similar to the habitual narrative, but within a context that indicates fantasy. The listener is drawn into this narrative, waiting to see not only what happens in the fantasy scenario but what real occurrence happens in its stead.

The final form of narrative recognized by Riessman is the episodic narrative. In episodic narrative, the speaker provides temporally ordered "episodes" that serve as short illustrations of a larger overall theme. Episodic narrative may be structured in story form, but each episode is not a discrete unit even if it is able to stand on its own linguistically as a story. The overall meaning being conveyed by the speaker in the narrative may be amplified by episodic telling, as in the case of a woman relating detailed episodes of spousal violence. Episodic telling may also flesh out and develop meaning by allowing the speaker to illustrate the same subject from varying points of view, as in the case of a newly single father illustrating feelings of being excluded by providing episodes of interactions with his son's teacher, his own parents, and his son.

Fitting With the Qualitative Literature on Separation

How to meld existing literature on a topic with a qualitative project in progress is somewhat debatable. When this subject was brought up on one computer discussion list I belonged to for a time, most posters argued that the literature about the subject of interest should not be read prior to data collection. Many argued that nothing on the topic should even be read prior to analysis, for fear of contaminating the process. This stance was explained as a way of helping to ensure that codes and themes would emerge naturally from the data, rather than being designed, consciously or not, prior to analysis.

I confess that I am much too cowardly to embark on a research project without having read fairly extensively on the topic. The three qualitative works that I have detailed above each contributed to the form and process of my research. I was able to make better sense of my resulting data by building on the work of these authors. In some ways, this work is written between these other studies as well, as each left me wanting information that I was unable to find.

I read Vaughan's (1986) work first, prior to designing the research, and was intrigued with her dramaturgical treatment of the separation process. My dissertation builds from her premise that separation is essentially an identity issue. The start of a separation begins when the relationship does not fit with one partner's sense of self. It then continues along in a manner that allows the separating people to manage others' perceptions of them as efficiently as possible given the circumstances in order to diffuse potential social sanctioning. Her book explains the mechanics and motives of behavior in separation thoroughly and with an awareness of how this behavior is constrained by social

expectations. However, the process outlined in *Uncoupling* detailed how people take cumulative, practical steps in building a new identity outside of the relationship. My particular interest, how people understand their position and status during separation, was only tangentially addressed.

I next discovered Riessman's *Divorce Talk* (1990), and gained insight into how people make meaning through narrative when going through divorce. Riessman's inclusion of both narrative and content analysis lead me to a second question that shaped this work. Riessman, like Vaughan, identifies the minimization of stigma as an impetus in divorce accounts. She takes the personal considerations of identity management still further by paying attention to rhetorical devices and context in narrative, but her thematic analysis of content left me wondering if there was not more to why participants with similar experiences (infidelity, violence, lack of closeness) react to these experiences differently and relate their stories differently. For example, Riessman states that "some men blame women for not being good housekeepers, with a quarter making negative comments about the quality of their wives' performance in the role of homemaker." (p. 55) This result is explained with the assertion that women are culturally expected to keep the home clean and that "men locate responsibility for poor housekeeping in their wives' characters." (ibid.) I brought the premise that I had taken from Vaughan, that all separating people's actions and accounts are informed by the need to establish and display a "self" that is not subject to stigma, and applied it to Riessman's thematic analysis. The question became not whether wives can keep house, or whether men blame wives who do

a poor job at housekeeping. I asked myself why *these* men chose to include stories of housekeeping at all, and how and why their criticism of wives' housekeeping might differ. I wanted narrative analysis that addressed identity directly, along with an across-case analysis that took into account the various identities being rhetorically constructed in the snippets of talk Riessman displayed as illustration of themes.

I decided to nest my research in this small but intriguing gap in the extant literature. Whether it was possible to address identity in this manner worried me. This nagging question was partly answered by the material I found in Weiss' study. I originally read Weiss as "background." His research on separation was conducted in the 1970s, and I thought I might use it as a jumping-off place to begin my review of more recent literature. However, when I read the book I realized that Weiss' work was relevant to my own study methodologically as well. Weiss attempts to build theory about personal identity transformation during the separation process. Because his focus is the individual experience of separation, albeit within the context of social interaction, this work more closely parallels what I hoped to accomplish. He uses thematic analysis exclusively, using segments of interviews to show what people say and do during separation, and to a lesser extent *why* they say and do these things.

He does not establish a strong link between the actions of separated persons and the experience of identity *during* separation, however. For Weiss, separation is a limbo people endure until they can find or establish "a self" outside of the marriage. I believe that this viewpoint is methodologically driven. Weiss separates out small portions of talk as illustrating examples of the categories that he builds, but he does not attend to the

mechanics of speech or the rhetorical context at hand. Nor does he map linkages between examples of talk. This is a critical omission. For the purposes of studying identity, it is relevant if the same participant who spoke of having an immature wife later speaks of letting himself into the marital home uninvited and sparking a fight with his wife.

It is my contention that multiple axes of meaning must be managed simultaneously in order to find the self or "selves" of separating individuals. The self being produced in separation narrative is a slippery self, as I have already noted. Each individual experiencing separation will have a biographically informed unique "self" that only they can produce. On the other hand, I believe it *is* possible to bring the richness of narrative analysis to bear on a general thematic study of the rhetorical selves available to separated spouses. By expanding Weiss' format for drawing inferences across cases from the use of short illustrating sections of talk to themed segments of narrative, and by attending to linguistic devices used in these segments, it should be possible to note subtle differences and similarities within themes. At the same time, by mapping out which themes different participants' talk addresses, it should be possible to show how various components of this talk are used within a separation account to claim some potential "separated selves" and disavow others. This work is an attempt to provide a fuller picture of the separated self by using narrative analysis to isolate and then reintegrate these different axes of meaning.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY OF THE NARRATIVE STUDY

> To see how individuals actually go about making sense, it is necessary to take language seriously, for in large part it is through language that we create our realities. Rather than bypassing the messy stuff of "talk," it needs to come to the center of the analysis, so that we can examine what people mean by what they say.
>
> – Catherine Kohler Riessman (1990, p. 17)

Obtaining participants

In planning this study I assumed that separated persons would welcome a safe outlet for their confusion and frustration and would be eager to talk. I expected to be the academic version of the sympathetic bartender, lending an ear to tales of heartache and disappointment, and I naively expected to have to turn away potential participants. To winnow what I had thought would be a burgeoning field of volunteers, I originally placed several restrictions on who would qualify to take part in the study. First, I decided that all potential participants should have been legally (formally) married. This requirement excluded gay and lesbian couples, as well as cohabiting couples and those who had "common-law" marriages. I made this decision based on two assumptions: that cultural referents and resources available to 'husbands' and 'wives' would be dissimilar to those available to other partners, and expectations of the 'spousal' identity are unique in their strength and social salience. I also intended to exclude any potential participants who had

been separated for less than two weeks for both my benefit and that of participants. I assumed that persons who were newly separated would still be extremely traumatized and I did not wish to probe a still-angry wound. My more selfish worry was that potential participants would make appointments for interviews and then reunite with their spouse before the interview took place, thereby removing themselves from my subject pool. Finally, I intended to exclude anyone separated for more than a year, as I expected that these partners may have resumed "life as usual" at this point and that the identity questioning aspect of marital separation might be less salient for them. I was concerned also that these spouses might be "extended" separated persons who use separation as a form of divorce (Morgan, 1988).

Finding participants proved to be much harder than I expected. Over the course of more than one year's time, I gradually increased both my recruiting efforts and my conception of the appropriate participant. My original recruiting efforts were designed to reach as many people as possible without limiting my sample to newspaper readers or consumers of a particular medium that carried advertising. I decided on recruiting fliers, and thought that local grocery stores would be a good basic recruiting base. Everyone has to eat, and I had hoped to minimize over-recruiting of a specific gender, class, or race by choosing a recruiting site that had something for everyone and was available in every area of town.

I approached every grocery store in my city and asked if I could post my fliers. Responses were less than encouraging. One major chain of stores has a policy against allowing any sort of solicitation and refused my request to place fliers in public areas. A

second chain seemed to have no set policy; two store managers refused my request for public access but allowed a flier to be posted in the employee break room, while two others allowed me to post fliers, one on the phone booth just outside of the front door of the store, and the other on the inside front window. The most accommodating stores did not prove to be very valuable sources of participants either, as several stores allowed me to post fliers on their public notice area but my fliers disappeared within a matter of days. I do not know if store employees removed the fliers, or if they were torn down by customers. To my knowledge, none of my participants were recruited through grocery store flliering.

Since I was unable to locate participants through grocery stores, I began to look for other venues that were open to the public and had some sort of area for posting handbills and notices. I was surprised at how difficult it was to find spaces to place public notices. The town where I recruited my participants is also home to a large state university, and has had ongoing controversy regarding the posting of handbills on publicly accessible surfaces. An ordinance outlawing the posting of fliers on lampposts had recently passed because college band fliering had become a pollution problem. When I went to the locations that once had been informally designated as de facto bulletin boards, I found clean concrete surfaces with the legend "no fliering" painted in black spray paint upon them.

I then resorted to posting on publicly accessible but specialized sites. My original plan of placing notices where almost anyone would come in contact with them had not worked out, so I approached owners of other small local businesses who I thought would

be sympathetic to my work. Here I had some limited success. A local independent bookstore allowed me to place a stack of fliers on a table that held free publications; at least four participants were found through this store, and were later interviewed in the store's café. I also placed fliers with the local displaced homemaker program at the community college, which brought me three participants.

Originally I had shied away from recruiting through therapists because I was concerned that the construction of the meaning of separation would be indelibly affected by therapeutic discourse. I had not wanted to reinforce the concepts of separation put forward by the extant literature unless these concepts were also being generated by individuals living through separation. Applying Loseke's (1999) cautions regarding the "troubled persons industry" (p. 148), I felt that sampling from a treatment center would inevitably yield a group of individuals who have had their experiences problematized for them and the solutions to these problems suggested if not directly stated by the therapist. Toward the end of my recruiting process, however, I decided to contact counselors and ask if they would make my fliers available in the public spaces of their offices, such as notice boards and waiting rooms. I contacted a total of fourteen counselors either directly or through an answering service or recorded screening service. Three eventually responded and I sent fliers to these offices. I also placed fliers in the waiting room of the local crisis center. I approached the branch office of the state health department to see if I could place notices there as well, but gave up my efforts when I found that this would require approval by a state committee. None of my participants came from these

therapeutic sources, although as I found out in talking with my participants several had undergone therapy at some point during their adjustment.

My last efforts involved using advertising media. I called in to a local radio station during a public announcement show and gave my study information over the air. I also placed a notice in an electronic newsletter that was sent to all employees of a large hospital chain with three branches in two different Florida cities. I received three participants through this electronic posting. Finally, I took out a print ad in a local news and entertainment paper that is available for free at various sites throughout the city, but without result.

During the course of my search, I also appealed to friends and colleagues to pass my name and office phone number along to separated friends, or, if they felt comfortable doing so, to provide me with names and numbers of these friends. I received a number of names, and eventually secured three interviews through personal referrals from friends or other participants. Word of mouth referrals brought their own complications, however. In one instance, a separated man was referred to me through a colleague. Upon getting his name, I realized that he was someone I had worked with nearly ten years before the start of my study. I called his number and left three voice mail messages before finally giving up on securing his participation. Although I have no way of being certain of his motives, I believe that his reluctance to tell me his story is rooted in contextual limits that he would experience. I would not be a "fresh" audience for him, as I knew him when he was married to this same spouse. I have several memories of him telling tales at work of his extramarital exploits, and I clearly recall him attempting to "pick up" attractive female

customers. My knowledge of this behavior would severely limit the storylines available to him in relaying his separation narrative. It would be impossible for him to portray himself as an innocent and aggrieved party, for example, or to highlight his wife's transgressions while selectively omitting his own.

My final sample consisted of twelve volunteers. Due to technical problems described later in this chapter, I ended up with a total of ten usable interviews. The majority of these persons were not only separated for some time, but had already been divorced Although my original plan was to exclude people who had already divorced, I found that it was impractical to turn away people willing to speak of their separation experience because they were not currently in the thick of the process. Later in this work I discuss the retrospective telling of the separation story after divorce, and I theorize why my original assumptions were faulty.

Procedures

Nine of the interviews were held at local area restaurants or cafes. I chose to allow my participants to decide on the interview site within reason – I would have been unwilling to meet a strange man at his home, for instance – but suggested restaurants for a dual purpose. A public venue seemed safest both physically and psychologically. As a researcher interested in marital difficulties, I was acutely aware that I would be asking questions about a traumatic subject, and I thought it would leave participants less vulnerable to do so on "neutral territory." Also, I was concerned about meeting strangers in any sort of private setting, especially as I was not sure if their separation story involved violence until after I had spoken with them. I did not want to find myself in the middle of

an estranged spouse and her batterer should I schedule a private meeting, or inadvertently tell a violent and angry participant the exact location of my office or home.

In most cases I did not feel it was appropriate to meet with participants in my home or theirs. There were three exceptions. On one occasion I agreed to meet a woman at her home after speaking with her on the phone several times. She expressed concerns about the confidentiality of meeting in a public space, and told me that her schedule was extremely full. Holding the interview at her home, she suggested, would allow her greater time flexibility and make her more comfortable. As she seemed to strongly prefer a home visit and I did not perceive any potential difficulties or dangers, I agreed. Two other participants were interviewed at my home; one was slightly known to me prior to the interview, and the other was referred by a close friend who was able to verify that this person posed no threat to myself or my family. During the two interviews at my home, I was alone in a main room with the participant, while during the interview at the participant's home her teenage daughter was present with her mother's consent.

The interview site was uneventful in all but two cases. In one instance, the restaurant where we had agreed to meet was too crowded for my participant's comfort, and he suggested changing to another local café. Accepting his recommendation was a poor decision on my part, as he chose an outdoor café during the early evening. Between his hushed speaking tones and the ambient noise of cars driving past and other diners having conversations, the tape of his interview is not clear enough to transcribe with any accuracy and so was not used. In the other instance, that of the mother and daughter present at the interview, my allowing the interview to take place at the participant's home

enabled her daughter to continually interject and informally take part in the interview process, although I cautioned her that I would not be able to allow her to participate directly by asking her questions or responding to her statements. The tensions brought forth by this unusual situation are discussed more fully in my analysis section.

Each participant was asked a series of basic demographic questions including age, education level completed, family income, number of children and ages of children, whether or not he or she has custody of children, and length of separation at the time of the interview. These basic questions were followed by a series of questions designed to elicit story, including "If you were to describe your separation in terms of a book, what would the major chapters be and what would they contain?" and "Are there times when you feel more married than others?" (see Appendix C). I used my list of open-ended questions as a guide rather than a strict template, and omitted questions that would have been redundant in the context of the interview. For example, a participant who opened her narrative with a story about her two children would not later be asked if she had children in the home. Also, clarifying and developing questions were added in the second half of data collection as themes began to emerge from already collected data.

Interviews ranged in length from approximately thirty-five minutes to more than two hours, and were tape recorded. I noted the major concept or subjects that seemed to come up during each interview prior to transcribing that tape. For instance, one interview with a participant I call Zack, was packed with references to illnesses, both mental and physical, suffered by his wife and himself. This interview was noted as having an overall illness theme, and early conceptual markers (type of illness, tone of interview interaction)

were also noted. As my work progressed I transcribed the tapes roughly in the order that they were recorded, and made brief notes to myself regarding basic themes that I heard in each interview. Generally these themes were more finely tuned variations on the main themes and concepts recorded shortly after the interview was held. Later, I coded these transcripts and divided them into narrative segments as I detail below. This allowed me to analyze the tales both in-depth as case studies and across participants in a comparative format.

During the transcription process I attempted to be as inclusive as possible. I felt that if I included too many linguistic characteristics and speech idiosyncracies these could be edited out of my presentation of data, but if omitted during the transcription process these details would be impossible to recapture. Because of this intent, and my desire to read beneath the content of utterances, I have included verbal "white noise" such as "umm," "ah," and the like, which other researchers might omit. I also include the majority of my own interruptions and prompts, such as "okay," and "sure," for this purpose. The use of ellipses is also part of my transcription process, and is meant to convey meaning to the reader. For each ellipsis in a segment of transcript, there is a notable pause of approximately one second. By notable pause, I refer here to a pause longer than that usually found between words or at the end of a sentence. Although what is "usually found" is likely somewhat subjective, shared linguistic conventions among speakers of English suggest that where I am hearing a notable or unusual pause, others will hear it as well. I maintained continuity among each segment of talk by timing my typing of the ellipses with the phrases "one, and," "two, and," and so on for each additional ellipsis. I

did not use a timing device such as a stopwatch, and for this reason I do not include exact notations of seconds paused. For example, instead of the more exact "I was going (3.5) to the store," my transcribed segment would read "I was going . . . . to the store." Extremely long pauses of around ten seconds or longer were noted with approximate numbers to highlight how very unusual the length of hesitation was in the conversation. The use of ellipses without spaces between them (...) are used to indicate an omitted section of talk, and should not be confused with the ellipses which indicate a pause in speech. By using these conventions, I hoped to provide my reader with a way to see pauses relative to each other both within one participant's talk, and across several accounts.

Because of the exhaustive nature of this form of research, and because I also intended to analyze the narratives with an eye to common themes across interviews, I did not focus on all eleven usable transcripts as individual cases for in-depth analysis. Had I done so, my final product would likely have been of unmanageable length. Instead, I chose three cases that were particularly evocative to me. I made this choice based on a mixture of professional considerations and personal preferences. The three cases provide an interesting contrast of demographic characteristics, as the three participants were quite dissimilar in education level, age, length of time married, and employment roles. Two of the three chosen participants were women. I also took into account the richness of the narratives when deciding which interviews to use for within-case analysis, and I chose the ones that I felt had the most detailed, intriguing, and engaging stories.

The Many-Headed Hydra: Managing the Data

I considered each of these three interviews as a discrete unit, and checked for coherence and fit among the various layers of meaning that arose from the narrative (see Riessman, 1993). I found that this was easiest if I did not analyze the three transcripts concurrently. Instead, I focused on one at a time, outlining all content, form, and rhetorical practice codes prior to taking up the next transcript. At first I left "story" outside of my analysis so that I could take a closer line-by-line look at content, and I did a preliminary listing of subject codes. I then took up story as a basis for analysis and reworked each transcript. In doing so, I had to decide where one story left off and another began in each person's account. I did not look solely for the traditional "complete" story form encapsulated by entrance and exit talk and fleshed out with details about actors, situations, and resolution (see Riessman, 1990). This would have discounted several stories told by my participants, because in relating linked stories the teller has the luxury of assuming that the audience already understands some of the basic background and context of the subject matter. Instead, I went through each transcript in successive waves after coding line by line for general content and the use of cultural referents. My first round of narrative chunking picked out the more traditional storied form indicated by entrance talk such as "there was this one time" and "I remember when we"; examples of "factual" occurrences were often related in this manner. I then went back through a second time and looked for the introduction of a new topic, whether prefaced by entrance talk or not.

This was a necessary measure, as some of the narratives in my participants' talk seemed to jump wildly from topic to topic with few thematic linkages and little or no warning. By chunking these segments as separate narrative acts within the account, I was able to get a better idea of the contexts that tended to encourage a topical or format jump. These segments of talk might not be considered "story" by some narrative researchers because they are generally short, atemporal, and fragmentary when compared to the more developed story form. However, when considered with an eye to conversational context, each of these segments fills a rhetorical "purpose" in relating information, which is the main requirement for the identification of narrative. Sometimes these seemingly fragmentary chunks were found within a story or narrative, and sometimes they were used as bridges between more developed stories. When a story wrapped a short fragmentary chunk at its beginning and end, I designated the entire segment as a frame story in my coding. These chunks was then included in analysis only within the larger story, as removing and considering them separately from their contextual framework would obscure important aspects of their meaning. Bridging chunks were not always kept intact with the preceding and following segments of transcript in the presentation of my results, but basic contextual description about this talk was given. When a storyline surrounded a larger, complete narrative about a different topic this was coded as separate units indicating the leaving of and returning to a narrative theme and the chunks were not always analyzed together..

In each of these three within-narrative cases, I considered whether the global meaning, or overall flavor and topical focus of the interview, was reflected again in local

coherence within content found in individual chunks of narrative. Finally, I considered the rhetorical techniques used to achieve these means, including metaphoric word choice, sentence structure, speech pauses and speed, repetition of words and phrases, cultural referents, and tonal emphasis. These techniques were analyzed within each narrative chunk, to better show the interplay between the content and process of storytelling.

Seven of the remaining eight interviews were then coded in a similar but abridged process. Each was first coded line by line for content and cultural referent. They were then analyzed twice to identify separate narrative segments; first I picked out structured stories, and then I searched for narrative fragments. The segments were coded regarding overall themes, taking into account both story content and rhetorical usage. Each participant's narrative themes were clustered under different domains to see what sort of a "self" each was putting together in talk. My goal at this stage of the analysis was to understand each separation account at two complementary levels: the experiential level, where participants narrate a "self-in-progress" through selective retelling of external events and internal states, and the metaphoric level, where syntax and word choice become means for conveying concepts not consciously or fully understood by the speaker (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Riessman, 1993). I hoped that in seeing how different participants chose among similar rhetorical devices and choices of content, I would be able to find different forms of rhetorical "selves" available to separated persons dependent upon context and biography.

A picture of the different selves available for use by separated persons began to emerge, as I saw how some participants evoked similar meanings, albeit with different

linguistic devices and content. For each type of separated self that emerged in this manner, I compared all participants who seemed to be using this self either in part or throughout their analysis. I noted the shared basic meanings found in each of these narratives to delineate the contextual boundaries for each rhetorical self.

I then suggest that a general stock of what I call "available selves" exists within the culturally informed "story" of marital disruption. People experiencing marital separation are free to choose, through rhetorically positioning their accounts, which "self" or "selves" they will take on within the limits of their own biographical experiences and the context of the interaction at hand.

The difference in level of meaning between my within-case analyses and my cross-case analysis is one of scope. Each of my within-case narratives illustrates the construction of a wholly unique self, one that cannot be "shared" by other people in similar circumstances because no two separation experiences can be identical in experience and interpretation. My treatment of across-case typologies is necessarily more general. Here I am stopping one level short of the unique individual experience of separation to show how similar experiences or interpretations give rise to a certain type of separated self. My presentation of these findings is similarly constrained by space limitations. Although I consider the overall storied meaning of each narrative segment prior to constructing typologies, I illustrate my findings with segments of talk chosen as representative. This reporting is closer to discourse analysis than narrative analysis in the strictest sense. (see Riessman, 1993)

The resulting layers of this work "nest" like recipes in a cookbook. Metaphorically speaking, the within-case analyses are illustrations of specific recipes, while the typologies of self are more broader categories of dishes. Each participant constructs one or more separated selves based on the ingredients and techniques they have at hand.

Sample Characteristics

Participants ranged in age from 23 to nearly 67 years old. The majority were in middle age (late thirties to late forties), and were female (eight of twelve total). It is possible that my recruiting efforts contributed both to the average age of my participants and to my oversampling of women. By searching for participants in part through a displaced homemaker program, I inadvertently targeted a population of older women in training to re-enter, or in some cases to enter for the first time, the work force after many years of marriage.

My participants were overwhelmingly white, with one Indian and one Latino participant. I was surprised to see that both education and socioeconomic standing of participants varied widely within my small sample. Several respondents had a high-school level education (diploma or general equivalency degree), others had a two- or four-year college degree, and three had advanced professional training or experience beyond a bachelor's degree. At the time of the interview, just under half of the respondents (five of twelve) mentioned experiencing very trying financial hardships as the result of separation. Three others noted that they were quite well off and had not experienced financial loss or discomfort. The remainder described what might be considered everyday financial struggles (working to pay bills, needing more money than was available, and so on) but

did not choose to highlight financial status in a way that implied money as a main theme within their stories.

Conversational Space and the "Missing Participant"

Not all of my interviews resulted in fully transcribed data. One interview was conducted in a busy location, as I have already mentioned, and the resulting tape quality was so poor that transcription was impossible. Although this was the result of bad judgement on my part, I do not consider it a mistaken interview; the interview itself went well, and I have no regrets about the process itself – only my choice of public venue.

One other interview could not be completely transcribed. This problem was not a 'technical' one that I can dismiss as not resulting from the interview process. My participant, whom I will call Barbara, spoke too softly to be heard on tape. At first I thought that this was unfortunate but not my fault. After going back over the field notes to try and figure out what happened – the tape is unintelligible in a weirdly disjointed way – I have come to the conclusion that I let this participant down. She was not being 'overly quiet.' She was being silenced, inadvertently, by me.

Barbara and I had tried for several weeks to contact one another about setting up an interview. She would continually leave messages on my voice mail, but I could not contact her and I found this very frustrating. Finally she called one evening when I was home, and we set up an interview time. I explained that I do not do interviews in homes for both privacy and safety reasons, and she wholeheartedly agreed. Then she explained that she was living in a battered women's shelter, and that this is why I had been unable to reach her. With the interview scheduled, we concluded our talk.

With most participants, I would schedule an interview and then not think specifically about that person until it was the time of the interview. Hardly surprising, as I did not know most of these people at all and had no way to think about them prior to meeting them. Barbara was different. I did not know anything about her specifically other than her status as "battered woman," but this status figured largely in my mind and I worried about the interview a good deal before it happened. I wanted to be thorough in my interview, but at the same time I didn't want to open any raw wounds. I assumed that a woman who had lived through such abuse that she needed to live in a shelter would be a veritable minefield of hot topics, and that talking about her marital troubles and separation would be extremely uncomfortable for both of us.

During the interview, I decided that the kindest course of action would be to tread lightly. In my field notes taken directly after the interview, I expose less noble motives for skirting the specifics of her marital trouble: "I worry that this will be awkward, that she will cry at the restaurant where we are meeting to talk, that she will somehow be angry at me for my questions. . . ." (field notes 7/12/01) In supposedly 'protecting' this speaker, I was actually protecting myself from having to deal with any emotional scenes. I was torn between trying to maximize my research opportunities and minimize the potentially upsetting content of Barbara's talk:

> Never cries during [the] interview but tends to talk so softly that I worry my recorder is not picking up her words. After the debacle with that one earlier participant where it was such a nightmare picking up what he was saying, this made me extremely concerned. I'm a bit ashamed of myself but I kept wanting to ask her to speak up – though I didn't dare. Felt creepy, especially since she seemed to be mortified by some of what she was telling me.

Barbara gave several indications that she was under distress. She "would put her hands in front of her mouth," and I noticed that her fingers were rough and chewed looking. When she got to a particularly difficult passage, the words would become muffled as she chewed the skin beside her fingernails. I worried that this habit of hers would "interfere with recording."

What I failed to notice until after I discovered the poor tape quality and went back over my field notes, is that Barbara may have silenced herself in part due to my failure to expand conversational space to include her more difficult narratives. Barbara would "dance around physical abuse" by saying that she "'ended up hurt' or some such when she got angry back at her spouse but she made it sound like some unseen thing hurt her in an undescribable way." For most of the interview I did not ask for examples, or even follow this topical thread. I was too uncomfortable and did not know how to proceed. So, I would wait until she seemed done with one segment of her narrative and then I would move on to the next question.

At the time of the interview, I failed to consider that Barbara's vague statements may in fact have been testing phrases, or bids for permission to take a difficult narrative into greater detail than would normally be permitted by informal conversational etiquette. What little bit of transcribed data that I have from this interview supports my contention. My memory of the interview process together with my hearing of the taped talk and my reading of the partial transcript has led me to believe that Barbara was never free to tell me the story that she needed for me to hear. She would speak fairly animatedly, although softly, until we got to one of the frequent spots where her husband's actions or motives

were mentioned. Then she would become vague: 'things' would happen, she would 'somehow' become harmed. Her narrative would stall at these points, suggesting that it was my turn to take up the talk. Instead of picking up this same theme and reinforcing Barbara's right to talk about these topics by asking "what things" or "how exactly did you get hurt," I interpreted these silences as not wanting to talk about that topic. I would then ask another question, effectively changing the topic before she had had the chance to tell her tale of abuse. For several question and answer exchanges our talk would be very terse. Then she would again work up to a story that included her husband, become vague, and leave the story dangling. Again and again I did not pick up this cue.

The result, on audiotape, is distressing. All of my questions are clear, so the recording equipment is not to blame, nor is background ambient noise. About thirty percent of her responses are clear, but for most of the ninety-minute interview there are no real 'chunks' of coherent talk that can be picked up. The talk that was recorded comes in fits and starts, generally only a few words at a time. Although the actual progression is unclear, these broken phrases hint at the topics she brings up in relation to my questioning. When the topic she addresses moves closer toward marital trouble the silences become longer and the 'clear' words less distinct.

The only segment that could be transcribed is a short period in approximately the final third of the interview. At this point I finally asked Barbara to clarify her evasions about abuse she experienced:

> Erica: If it's not too much to ask, you've alluded several times to, you know, things he did or what he used to do, can you tell me? There are so many different types of abuse.

> Barbara: It was, um, mainly control. Power, control, which I used to accuse him of treating his employees better than he did his family, I didn't find out till the end he did not, he treated them the same way. Um, I wold say, that he had them so intimidated, the ones at the last [worksite] that they never thought, they knew it was going on, they never thought to tell anyone. They never did. Um, they helped me but, they were literally, and I didn't know how bad it was, in fear for their jobs. Because they believed he would fire them. But they still did help me. Um, and then when I just recently (tape unclear), something would happen, I remember I was angry (Mm hm) but I wasn't gonna hurt him, I was hollering I guess or something (Mm hm) and something would happen (Right) and he, he would say "I was keeping you from hurting yourself," but I was the one with the bruises. (Okay) So, I don't know if that makes it physical, it didn't happen very often (Uh huh) he didn't break things, he didn't holler a lot.

Barbara and I continue to discuss tangential details about her husband's actions: her family's reaction to her separation, how he has talked about her to people, how he planned to get her to leave. Again I do not pick up on the vagueness within even this 'clarification' and pursue the matter further. Barbara has twice mentioned "something happened" in this narrative, and although she states that people at her husband's work knew it was going on and tried to help as much as they could, she never specifies what "it" is. After perhaps fifteen minutes, the talk comes around again to abuse because I have accidentally asked the right question to trigger more narrative:

> Erica: So your son was critical of your husband.
>
> Barbara: Yeah. (Okay.) He was also terribly abused by my husband. And the other two weren't, and I never understood why. Nor was I, the way he was, because he always gave him (tape unclear)
>
> Erica: He was much more affected?
>
> Barbara: By the abuse.

It is telling that Barbara has opened up here enough to bring up the issue of abuse without my having asked about the topic directly. Still, I do not ask how her son was "terribly abused," nor do I try to figure out what Barbara meant by "nor was I" and "the way he was." Instead I skim over these issues and ask about the effects of the abuse on her son. This is the last segment of coherent audiotape. To my recollection I never asked for specific information about the abuse again; I consider this interview one of the bigger failures I encountered during the process of my research. I had attempted to save both her feelings and my data by giving Barbara the freedom to speak or not speak as she chose – or so I thought. Barbara likely did not perceive this as freedom, as the conversational space established in the interview did not allow her to take her narrative where she wished to go. As a result, in protecting participant and data I silenced one and sacrificed the other.

The Researcher as the Research Instrument

Many of the practical problems that I encountered during the course of my data collection occurred well before I began interviewing. There were a number of oversights in my study design. I originally expected to have recruiting efforts yield an embarrassment of riches, and thought that I would be able to recruit as narrowly as possible and then take the ideal participants from a larger pool of volunteers.

I exploited this sense of security when I wrote up my protocol for submission to my university's Institutional Review Board (or IRB). The IRB is a panel of scholars who review proposed research plans to ensure that these plans conform to practical and ethical guidelines for safeguarding researchers and participants. True to the nature of their

function, the IRB insists upon a fully detailed description of what will be done to or with participants, and how attendant risks of the research will be managed. If a researcher fails to provide sufficient information, the protocol has to be rewritten and re-submitted to the review process. This may mean the loss of a number of weeks of research time.

In my naivete, I assumed that I could tap into a large pool of potential participants through very basic means of recruiting. I also assumed that these participants would have at least two characteristics in common: they would be currently separated, and would be eager to talk at length about this experience with only a minimum of prodding on my part.

Since I thought that my early efforts would result in success, I effectively painted myself into a corner in my proposal to the IRB. I sent in a detailed interview question outline, but did not note that I would need to expand or revise this outline as new themes emerged from the data. I also limited my recruiting in my original proposal to only those publicly accessible venues that had no therapeutic or professional purpose, such as grocery and book stores or print ads in newspapers. My original protocol passed quite quickly.

Unforseen Complications: Getting Through Review

Unfortunately, following my original protocol yielded very few volunteers. In order to expand my field of recruiting as I have previously outlined, I had to revise my protocol to allow for electronic media and therapeutic venues. This protocol was returned as being potentially exploitative of vulnerable people, as posting through therapeutic venues might encourage potential participants to believe that their therapists or counselors were endorsing my research. A secondary revision was completed, and the proposal was further re-worded at this time to allow for expansion of the basic question outline as

needed for understanding or theoretical saturation. My original idea of listing exact parameters for my research in my IRB application so that it would pass quickly had backfired. From original conception of my design until the final IRB revision containing all of the changes I eventually found necessary, my study was in and out of review for over one year.

In retrospect, it seems obvious that I would have had such difficulties finding willing participants. My research requires that participants admit to uncertainty about their life status, which might be quite threatening to discuss with a stranger. Also, the topic area of family is fraught with a number of ideological and moral overtones; "family values" suggest that the right way to 'do' family is for two people to marry and remain married. Family life is also generally kept private, and in asking participants about marital strife and breakup I am requesting that they air their familial dirty laundry in public. Separating from one's spouse is not only a liminal circumstance, but a stigmatized one.

A perfect illustration of how deeply ingrained the taboo against speaking of family troubles is can be seen in a call I received late in my data collection. A woman who would not leave her name called me about my study. I tried to explain to her that in order to make an appointment for an interview I would need to know her name, although I would not use her name in any documents or transcripts. She refused, and I politely inquired why she was calling and whether she wanted to call back another time. She explained that she had made a promise to a faculty member who is on my committee that she would call me about my study. In calling me, she fulfilled her obligation to this person. However, she was unwilling to speak with me about her experiences, so she refused to give me her

name or telephone number. For this woman, even knowing a contact person on the committee guiding my research was not sufficient safeguard to allow her to feel safe talking about such a personal issue as marital separation.

Emotional Engagement with Topic and Data

Throughout the course of this research I have struggled with my own emotional response to the subject matter and data, as well as to the process of research itself. I had of course expected writing the dissertation to be challenging and occasionally frightening, but I had no idea how personalized my thoughts and feelings about the work would eventually become. As I progressed in the work and the work itself became larger, with more attendant literature and more numerous practical concerns like transcription and recruitment, I began to think of the work as something outside of myself rather than something that was produced by me:

> Strange that I've started to think of the research as a separate entity, and not a very friendly one at that. This is probably not a good thing. I emote 'toward' the dissertation like it's some friend who has done me dirty . . . feels almost like it is sentient and nasty, like it is finding ways to block me or stray off course. . . . I wonder how much of this is tied in with issues about the IRB. (research journal, April 19, 2001)

Considering and disclosing my own emotional response to the process and content of my work is, I feel, very important. As a qualitative researcher, I am an active producer of texts on several levels during the research process. I make decisions about questions ("this question isn't going over well, maybe I should junk it or reword it"), about how to transcribe what I hear ("should I use standard speech transcription, or use marks to delineate pauses or elongated vowel sounds?"), about what to include and where to include it in the written re-presentation that will be my final text.

Having so many choices, and so much active responsibility for the final product, can weigh heavily. There is always the thought that you have chosen wrong, that somehow it would have been better, worked more smoothly, if an alternate route had been taken. Qualitative research is inherently open and allows the data to guide the process to a greater or lesser extent depending upon the researcher's theoretical standpoint. In my case, this same openness was alternately exhilarating and paralyzing. At times I wished I had chosen a topic that would have required access to a site, so that I could bolster my role as co-constructor of the reality emerging from each interview with "less interpretive" data about physical settings and individuals' actions:

> I think this is why I have "field envy." I think about P's project and L's project and I wish I had chosen a topic that allowed for observation and conventional note taking. Again, I'm irked with myself. If I am working in a co-constructed virtual field that I enter every time I do an interview, and the 'field' is an interior one bound by my participants' stories (words, emotions, recollections on the subject), where am I? . . . I feel like I somehow misplace and mess up this field in turns. (research journal, October 15, 2001)

I second-guessed almost everything about the dissertation at some point during the process. At one point I even went so far as to wish that I had chosen another method entirely, one that would have absolved me of the responsibility of being so central to the work:

> I am currently in the thick of writing my dissertation, and the depth and violence of my emotional response to this activity continually surprises me. It seems that my emotions and thoughts are more appropriate to a love affair gone awry than to a piece of scholarly research: it seemed so promising in the beginning, where did this get off track, are other people in my situation suffering similarly, I could have gone with a different topic or method and I wouldn't be in this mess, and even occasionally *I hate you*. (research journal, July 2001)

Probably the most troubling doubts I had were related to the content and quality of my data. The failure of my early recruiting efforts was extremely discouraging. While I understood that I would not really know what I had uncovered until late in the analysis portion of my work, I became panicked during data collection that I was somehow attracting 'weird' or 'odd' people since 'normal' people did not seem to want to talk with me. Recruiting efforts were going very slowly, and when I did conduct an interview I was continually surprised by the extreme hardships and unusual circumstances reported by my participants. My insecurities were magnified when I guest lectured in another graduate student's Social Problems class. I delivered a lecture on methods, and then followed up with a presentation of my own data and preliminary analysis as an example of qualitative research. When I began to read one transcribed segment in particular, about a woman who had been raped and became pregnant and then, while pregnant, married a male friend whom she did not love but who promised he would protect her, several students snickered and one muttered 'where does she get these people?':

> I am in a really peckish, out-of-sorts mood today. Part of it is my continual worry that I won't have enough 'good' data. I worry that the data I already have is dog data. No good. I still remember giving the guest lecture to S's class . . . never thought I'd be actively heckled by a room full of postadolescents, but there you go. The data did seem a bit extreme while I was collecting it . . . The situations don't feel typical enough for 'proper' social science . . . I worry that I will be accused of picking and choosing the extreme candidates. (research journal, May 25, 2001)

Coming to Terms: Content Informs Process

The schism between where I had hoped to be at the end of the data collection phase, and where I found myself when I had exhausted all reasonable recruiting efforts, was obviously quite severe. At first I felt that I did not have enough persons, because I

had originally planned to interview between twenty and thirty respondents. This specific range was chosen not for any theoretical purpose, but because it seemed like a sample large enough to allow a full exploration of my topic. I ended with slightly more than half of the minimum number of participants I had originally intended to interview.

Worse, in my earliest perceptions of the research process, the data that I had at hand was poor in quality, although not lacking in informative and entertaining narratives. Each interview seemed to grow exponentially, as my focus switched from getting more individual respondents to sectioning each interview into its many narrative segments. It was not uncommon for me to find forty or fifty identifiable narrative segments in each transcript, and many of them seemed at first listen like entries in a 'my marriage is worse than yours' contest. The stories were so uniformly distressing yet so topically varied that I was at first afraid that I had somehow chosen an entire sample of extreme cases.

As I transcribed and mourned what I saw as a lack of "good" data, I began to notice parallels between my sense of failure and that described by participants. I felt that I had made some sort of critical mistake that I did not understand, and that had sent me down a road that I had not planned to take. This sensitivity to disappointment affected my transcription and early analysis of interview tapes. Again and again, I heard participants make comments like "I don't know what I was thinking" or "it seemed a good idea at the time." These comments might otherwise have seemed flippant, but from my vantage point I heard disappointment in one's choices and outcomes. As a result, I noticed many instances where the *whats* of participant narrative, or the biographical details they used to create story, seemed to be at odds with the self that they were trying to portray. I began

to ask of each participant's transcript, *who are you trying to be in this situation, and who might you be if your attempt fails*? This stance allowed me not only to take a better look at how participants understood their separated status and the everyday realities of being separated, but at how the ambiguous marital status allowed for further explanation and refinement of a marital identity under dispute.

As I explored participants' narratives, I in turn confronted my own story of the research process that had been constantly – and negatively – present. My internal dialogue regarding the research process storied both my efforts and the participants' narratives in ways that had temporarily blinded me to other interpretations of both process and data. I realized that while I had hoped to find 'good' data, I had not yet come to fully appreciate the richness of the data I had at hand. In order to be able to look at the data objectively rather than as something that had or had not met my own expectations, I had to understand what about this data was upsetting to me, and why it bothered me to such a great extent.

I decided to consciously separate those segments of interviews that made me uncomfortable and ask myself why I had a problem with those particular passages. These segments were easy to identify; I could recall in detail cringing inwardly during interviews at these segments. I also recalled fighting with my own methodological choices during these points, as I alternately wanted to change the topic away from something that I found disturbing and dig more deeply to see if such a contentious topic was being used by a participant for a particular reason. By sifting through and identifying those segments and chunks of data that I had an especially strong reaction to, I could constructively indulge

my urges to label some of the data as unwholesome. I did not code this separate data in detail as I had with the whole transcripts, because this process was completely subjective and grounded largely in my own personal biography and sense of decorum. Taken as a whole, however, I found that the segments of transcript that gave me pause tended to be those where participants were making their claims of a justified separation by describing in detail how debasing the relationship had become. The participants were violating the rules of polite conversation, as I had asked them to do by questioning them about their separations, and I had reacted as one might when told personal details by a complete stranger.

This reflexivity had another unforseen benefit. After I reconsidered the complete transcripts prior to breaking them into narrative segments, I was able to see each whole interview transcript more objectively. What I had taken for 'bad' data was not bad per se, but included many stories that were at turns messy, tawdry, petty, and bitter. As I describe in the following chapter, such stories are not unusual in separation tales. Yet not all of the tales of woe elicited the same response. Some stories were extremely graphic, yet had not been singled out as an emotionally loaded section of transcript. Those that affected me most strongly were those where I was drawn into the narrative somehow and became a *facilitator* of what felt like an unseemly display. Often, participant prompting through either prolonged silence or rising vocal inflection required me to insert positive replies. For example, in a story of infidelity a participant might tell me that she was justified in her cheating because of how terribly her husband had treated her. Then a silence of several seconds would place responsibility for continuing the conversational

flow with me. Rather than changing the subject, I would use words like "okay" or "right" to signal that I understood and approved of the current narrative. With this encouragement, the participant often elaborated the original statement by providing details not easily excusable in a more standard conversational setting. On occasion I also returned to a subject previously dropped by a participant because I sensed a reluctance in their narrative that might indicate a very personal story. Through experience I learned that these narratives tended to be extremely rich and interesting, although explicit in subject matter. Once such stories were elicited, participants tended to talk at length and in great detail, as though a barrier had been removed.

Becoming a part of these stories of betrayal and loss in this manner was oddly embarrassing. A reconsideration of the same research journal entry where I described being heckled by the class gave me my strongest cue about this emotional response:

> I have huge cultural and religious differences [in the sample], several tales of mental illness, one harrowing narrative of rape and exploitation, and I can remember sharing these narratives with that class and the students gawped and laughed and rolled their eyes like they were at Jerry Springer. (research journal, May 25, 2001)

My choice of words and cultural referents in this passage are telling. As a qualitative sociologist, I am sensitive to potential claims that my work is not 'scientific' enough, or is exploitative of my participants. In this passage I likened myself to television talk how host Jerry Springer and in doing so exposed my fears of having taken the active interview format that I prefer too far. Jerry Springer, as part of his television format, will arrange guests' narratives in ways that highlight 'juicy' or emotionally painful content. Often he will encourage guests to speak badly about one another or divulge previously kept secrets

to cause dissent. Although my goals were quite different than Jerry Springer's, I worried that my cuing and probing caused participants to divulge highly personal information in a more sensational manner than they otherwise would have. Linked to this worry was the concern that I had somehow sullied the data by probing along these lines.

By separating and then re-integrating these chunks of data, I realized that I had been negotiating with my participants regarding what was and was not permissible in the conversational field. I had extended the more conventional conversational boundaries to include taboo topics and means of expression through my use of cues and probes. Areas that seemed 'off limits' were especially inviting, as I am interested in both form and content of narrative. By considering the who each participant wanted to be in any given story, I could see also the many possible whos they wanted to deny through hesitation or evasion. This feature of narrative analysis is the concept of "languages of the unsayable," or the ability to note and analyze what is hidden, missing, or downplayed. (Rogers, Casey, Ekert, Holland, Nakkula, and Sheinberg, 1999) When conceptualizing self, these means for hiding a less than ideal presentation may in some instances be more telling than what is actually said.

Languages of the unsayable (Rogers et al., 1999) are identified in four ways. First, a narrator may explicitly and emphatically evoke an opposite in order to negate or downplay an undesirable self trait or circumstance. In the "language of negation" (ibid., p. 88), for example, I might stress that although I believe in strict discipline for my child I never, *never* spank. Such a statement could indicate I have important and conflicted feelings about the issue of physical discipline, and that I wish to avoid further inquiry on

the topic because it might lead my narrative into the danger zone of 'self as potentially abusive' or 'self as overly strict'. The "language of revision" (ibid.) is more straightforward. By using this technique I effectively erase markers of my already-constructed self and replace them with others of my choosing. If I have narrated a tragic story of lost love, for instance, and then state that "I don't think I was ever really in love with him," I negate several aspects of the history I have already recounted. I am no longer a survivor of heartbreak, but a wiser individual who learned from a less than ideal situation. This linguistic technique allows for multiplicity within narrative, because the analyst does not note either part of the story as more "true" than the other. The final two forms, "languages of smokescreens and evasions" and "languages of silence," are more difficult to identify because they can easily be misinterpreted. (ibid.) Smokescreens and evasions attempt to redirect the listener toward what is said in order to move away from an uncomfortable topic. Silence is perhaps the most challenging form because some silence is inevitable, and not always topically noteworthy, in an interview. Silences on subjects due to failure to ask questions are treated as omissions, while silences in response to questions that ask information are treated as significant: "Other information, however, which might have been offered but was not, may be more appropriately regarded as a silence." (ibid., p. 89)

My stance as active interviewer allowed me to more sharply delineate these languages in my participants' narratives. I did not merely note hesitations or evasions; often I pursued these areas to better understand why a particular participant seemed reluctant to speak about a topic. As a result, my findings include both constructions of the

desirable self and explicit negations of other potential selves. This is most evident in my detailed treatment of within-case separation narratives. Three participants present especially rich and well-developed claims to a certain separated self or selves presented in the following chapter: Zack, who claims what I term the "frustrated healer" identity; Sara, whose claim to a wronged but noble self is undermined by a competing narrative, and Laurie, who claims a not-married identity by storying herself as a victim of fraud.

CHAPTER 4
STORYING THE SEPARATED SELF

Every married couple consists of two persons with unique experiences and biographies. The hopes, desires, and fears that they bring to the marital union all inform how their interactions will progress, and how they will in turn interpret the information received in interaction. Sociologist Jesse Bernard touched upon this complication when she presented the concept of "his and hers" marriages:

> Indeed, with respect to even such basic components of the marriage as frequency of sexual relations, social interaction, household tasks, and decision making, they [spouses] seem to be reporting on different marriages. As, I think, they are. (Bernard, 1972 p. 5)

Although Bernard recognized here that there is no unified experience of marriage shared by both spouses, she did not extend her concept of biographically-informed marriage to its logical conclusion. Some aspects of marital life are gendered and can be considered from this vantage point. However, this experiential division is merely skimming the surface by dividing the category of 'marriage' into two alternative types. Subdividing one of these two categories, the 'hers' marriage, still further shows the many and varied possibilities of how one marriage may become several different marriages. The experience of 'hers' marriage will differ depending upon demographic factors aside from gender, such as income and parenthood status. This same marriage experience will next be affected by personal experiences and traits such as temperament, childhood

experiences, and spouse's personality. The potential combinations are endless. While any number of women may have experiences that are identical at first glance, how these experiences are understood and the effect they will have on the union are situation-specific. The standard "hers" marriage now becomes "her" marriage, unique to the individual woman.

Contextual Embeddedness of the Separated Self

Considering the temporally grounded nature of biography and experience, it is not hard to see how "her" marriage to one man may vary over time or across context. When the marriage is new it may be perceived quite differently than it will after ten years and two children. Nor is a long period of elapsed time required for the experience of a marriage to change. If Mrs. Jones spends Saturday happily combing antique stores with her husband of twelve years whom she loves dearly and trusts implicitly, "her" marriage experience may be perceived as difficult at times but positive overall. Should she receive a phone call from her husband's mistress Saturday evening, by morning "her" marriage will have taken a vastly different tone, and her interpretations of both present and previous interactions are likely to be revised in light of these new circumstances. During the course of any marriage, therefore, there are likely to be "her marriages," rather than one static marriage that is hers.

It would be naive to expect marital separation to be less contextually bound than the marriage that precedes it. Marital separation has fewer normative markers that spouses may use as reference points. What constitutes a "good" marriage is subjective, but is still more easily understood than what makes a "good" separation with healthy

interaction between estranged spouses. My task in this chapter is to balance this need for detailed analysis of the experiential nature of marital separation with my goal of producing theory regarding the separated self.

In doing so, I necessarily begin with an extremely close view of the separation narratives of three participants. By comparing global, local, and themal coherences within each individual case, I attempt to show what self or selves each participant attempts to establish during the interview (see Agar and Hobbs, 1982). My unit of analysis for these cases is not the participant per se, as each participant may draw upon several personae in establishing who they are trying to present. Rather, I consider individual narrative chunks as units for analysis within the larger unifying context of each participant's complete account. I explain the overall impressions that an account leaves when heard or read as a whole, and I then weave together informational content and linguistic devices to further explore aspects of the participant's identity as a separated spouse.

I then cross-compare the content and linguistic codes generated in these close readings with the accounts of my other participants. Although I cannot hope to establish any static form that separation follows, nor any predictable "separated self" that a specific type of person is likely to experience, I do present a typology of separated selves that participants may draw from in constructing their separation narratives.

The names of the characters in these separation stories have been changed, as have very specific identifying characteristics such as an unusual profession, hobby, or hometown. Names of characters that were never specified in the interview were a bit more challenging. In providing descriptive back story for each narrator's account, I gave

these players names to avoid the constant use of phrases like "Mary's husband" or "the secretary." My name choices in these cases were unusual, such as Norman and Edith rather than Mike and Jennifer, to minimize the chances that I inadvertently "guess" the correct name. Basic physical descriptions have been kept the same where they do not immediately identify the person. There are any number of women with short brown hair and glasses, for example, but if this same woman had a tattoo or other immediately recognizable mark it would be omitted from my description.

My interpretations of the meaning being constructed in these narratives are only one possible interpretation of this data. It is possible that another researcher, given the same transcripts, would find different nuances than those that I have presented. I have also had to choose representative segments of talk to keep this study from becoming overly long. These caveats do not invalidate my findings, however. Qualitative work inescapably requires that the researcher "enter into" the text and re-story data for presentation in scholarly format. In following Riessman's (1990) work as a general guideline, I have chosen to present long segments of talk in their entirety so that the reader can more easily see how I have come to my interpretations. He or she can then choose to accept these interpretations or to look for alternate readings within these accounts. In either case, I feel that my goal of providing a better understanding of the separated self will have been met.

Manipulation and construction of the self

From the standpoint of the study of self, all of my participants are actively constructing both *toward* the preferred self or selves that they wish to claim within the

context of marital separation, and *against* competing selves that are seen as less desirable. As I explore their choices in language and content, I attempt to lay bare the means that each participant uses in this process. My analysis makes each participant look quite conniving and manipulative as a result, an outcome that other qualitative researchers interested in the self have also noted (see for example Vaughan, 1986).

Manipulation is a key element in constructing one's self in any given situation. There is no self that does not involve monitoring one's appearance as seen by others (Mead, 1934). If one misperceives "who" the other person expects to interact with, and how this other expects the interaction to progress, the social interaction will be strained. Inability to manipulate others' perspectives, or failure to accurately determine what self is being called for in a certain context, ensures failure of the performance being given (Goffman, 1959).

Talk is a fluid medium for establishing a strong performance. Managing the telling of events and motives allows the speaker to sway the judgement of his or her audience. This is enacted most effectively by allowing the audience to infer or draw conclusions from the interplay of "whats" and "whys"; embedded within both the what and the why is the interpretation of meaning that is being conveyed, explicitly or implicitly, by the speaker. For instance, a separation account highlighting stories about "then one day he hit me" and "he would always come home drunk" is more than just an account of misery. This account will likely be perceived by an audience as a tale of a justifiable separation where the husband is at fault and the wife is blameless. If the story is less skillfully managed, however, the desired positive judgement may not be forthcoming. For example,

this same story about spousal violence might include a preamble detailing the wife's frequent and blatant infidelity, and then segue into "then one day he hit me." While the more complete version may be the more factually correct, for the practical purpose of establishing blame this version is less powerful; the attribution of blame for the relationship's problems has potentially shifted at least in part to the speaker.

What to include and what is best omitted extends to means of telling, as well as biographical offerings. If a story contains direct verbal attribution of motive or goal, it may fall flat. Goffman (1959) cautions that the effective presentation of self is one that is seamless enough to be taken for "real"; if any aspect of the act is visible, it calls the entire performance into question. A participant who states "it's all her fault" or "I didn't do anything, he's a jerk" has placed the motive of attribution too centrally in the narrative. The listener, hearing such statements, will bring them to bear on other aspects of the story. Narrative episodes that support this speaker's overstated motive may then be discounted as being biased because they may be heard as attempts to influence rather than to relate information.

This theoretical outlook, with its emphasis on appearances, seems to imply that people are shallow and false when they actively manipulate how they are received in interaction. Not so. From a constructionist standpoint, greater effort at producing a desired self in a specific context does not result in a less "authentic" product self than does less conscious effort to present a self in a more familiar situation. Both are socially produced, ongoing products subject to interpretation and re-invention should the need arise. I am no more false when I am on my best behavior at a job interview than I am

when I am at home with my family; there is no privileged "true" me at the core of my constructions. I am merely more familiar with the setting and expectations in the second instance, and have a longer period of time in which to reinforce this self, so the performance becomes more rote. The manipulative aspects of everyday interaction are hidden by familiarity and so seem genuine unless a person is confronted by a new or challenged role, just as the many intricate muscular movements involved in walking are taken for granted until a muscle is pulled in the lower back or an ankle is sprained.

The participants in my study are perhaps more cognizant of the need for manipulation of audiences, because of the increased potential for stigma that results from ending a heterosexual union (see Vaughan, 1986). But, their liminal marital status in no way makes them more manipulative than the average Joe or Jane on the street, nor are they an unusually Machiavellian group. These participants *do* have greater motive and means at their disposal, however. Their field of potential selves is less restricted by social norms than when they were in an intact marriage.

Perhaps more importantly, the collective store of traits proffered to the newly uncoupled is less than inviting. Each estranged partner will seek to form alliances with others, including a researcher who asks questions about the relationship, through the relating of motives and actions that show them in a sympathetic light (see Vaughan, 1986). It is hardly surprising that separated people consciously attempt to control others' impressions through talk. The partner who leaves may be seen as a long-suffering person who did the best he or she could, or alternately could be characterized as cold, cruel, unfaithful, foolish, irresponsible, and so on depending upon context.

Such judgement, although not necessarily stated explicitly in an interaction, is inescapable. By presenting any given self, a person inevitably "subjects that self to inspection and control" (Zussman, 2000 p. 7). The selves that are produced through my participants' talk take this potential inspection and control into account. With the stories they tell as their tools, each builds a coherent self or selves that they perceive as both contextually available and thematically desirable. My analysis of this process breaks these identity structures down into component parts to see how they are built. If in doing so I portray my participants in unflattering ways, it is the wholly unintentional consequence of making visible techniques and motives which are present – but usually hidden – in accounts of self.

Within-Narrative Themes

Zack's Account: The Frustrated Healer

Zack walked into the café where we were to meet for our interview, and at first I did not expect him to be the man that I was waiting for. Most separations and divorces occur relatively early in a marriage, and so I generally expected participants in the age range of around twenty to forty-five years of age. At nearly 67 years old, Zack was to be the oldest participant in my sample. He wore glasses and had white hair that was partially hidden by his baseball cap. He was dressed for the hot weather in walking shorts, t-shirt, and white athletic shoes. We shook hands, and sat down at a table to begin our discussion.

Before I turned on the tape recorder to began the structured interview, we made standard small talk about the setting and my equipment. Zack made several comments

that suggested he was highly educated and intelligent; he commented on how frequently he visited the setting (the café is located inside a local book store) and he compared aspects of my dissertation process to his experiences when writing his own doctoral thesis.

I was surprised at how knowledgeable he seemed to be about the paperwork aspects of research. Zack expressed familiarity with the rigors of social research, and joked that the gargoyles found on the rooftops of many university libraries are actually doctoral candidates frozen during the long process of writing a dissertation. Unlike most of my participants, he asked detailed questions about the consent form I used, and about my experiences so far in conducting my research.

After I began recording our talk, I noticed that Zack chose his words more carefully and spoke more slowly than did most of my participants. Generally, after a short amount of time a participant will seemingly forget he or she is being taped. The self-consciously wooden aspect of the responses will fall away, leaving a more conversational and confessional tone. Although Zack did tell stories enthusiastically, I continually had the sense during the interview that he was aware that he was being taped, and was choosing his words with this in mind.

Perhaps the nature of Zack's story required him to exercise additional care in relating his experiences. Zack's circumstances were unique. He was the initiator of the separation, and Edith, his wife of more than forty years, was seriously mentally ill. Edith was prone to bouts of extreme paranoia: helicopters that flew overhead were assumed to be spying on her, doctors who tried to medicate her were poisoners, and the people in the television set were talking to her directly. As Vaughan (1986) has explained, the initiator

of the breakup of a heterosexual union faces a great deal of stigma and takes steps to manage others' impressions of his or her choices. In Zack's case, his initiating a separation from Edith not only defies conventional mores about the sanctity of marriages – especially marriages of long duration – but also violates the well-publicized dictum of "in sickness and in health, 'till death do us part."

Zack's account stands out most strongly as a tale of health and illness. This is due in large part to Edith's recurrent and disabling battle with mania. It is also likely that Zack's age contributes to this recurrent theme. As an elderly person, he faces health problems and fears that are not yet concerns for most young, able-bodied adults. However, Zack continually reinforces the general theme of health and illness in his talk, whether or not his response requires him to mention his wife or his health. Comments about his everyday activities, his personal beliefs, and his separation experience are also cast in this light. As a result, Zack's account sounds like an illness-themed separation tale when heard in its entirety.

When this account is broken up into individual narratives, a different picture emerges. As I coded each segment of talk, some seemed to be oddly out of conversational context. Other segments contained illness talk used in an abrupt and unusual manner. It became clear that Zack was not merely telling a story of sickness coming between spouses. As a straightforward narrative of illness-related separation, Zack's story lacks strong coherence and logical progression. However, if Zack's story is recast as an account that actively *draws* upon illness and health both as subject matter and as a linguistic device, rather than as an account designed to tell a story about these topics,

the seemingly disparate pieces fit together well. By considering different narrative threads across stories within this account, several patterns of Zack's telling become apparent. Zack uses professionalism claims, illness stories, and stories of a "sick" relationship to place his role in this marital separation in a more positive light. Through the use of story, Zack establishes a separated self that is blameless, yet in a position of authority. He portrays himself as a spouse who has exhausted every possible effort to improve Edith's health and the health of his marriage, but who cannot be expected to save health where the pathology is so far gone. This self, which I term the frustrated healer, allows Zack to take credit for attempting to save his wife and his marriage while avoiding any share in the responsibility for marital disruption.

Early in our conversation, Zack linguistically "locates" all of the relevant parties for his ensuing narrative. Zack is a "minister," and his wife is "officially" mentally ill:

> Erica: Okay. And is this your first separation from this spouse? Have you separated before?
>
> Zack: She . . separated for one year, in nineteen-ninety. (Okay) Ah . . . I'm a minister and I've been working at some churches and I've been at this little church out at [area lake] on the East side of town. (Okay) And, ah, a parsonage is provided out there and we were living out there. And she decided..she would go back to our house, which is here in [hometown]. (Mmhmm) And ah, just left me there in the parsonage there. . And then in 1997, .. She had some med, some health problems, and ah, that's why we, that's why we are separated now. (Licks lips) She needed to be, stabilized...so I instituted the Baker Act, July of '97. (Mmkay) She was taken to the ah, crisis stabilization unit here in [area and street name]. (right, right) [Name of facility], and she stayed there a few days. (Clears throat) And ah (licks lips) . . . it was awkward for her to, to ah, go back to the house and be with me. . after that for her and her [tape unclear], so, she went home, when she was released from there, discharged, she went to the home of . . . our daughter who lives here in town.

Placement of this story is as telling as its content. This is one of the first questions I ask of participants, and is in the same segment of the interview as other questions about biographical particulars such as age and length of marriage. Most participants, when asked if this is the first separation from their spouse, simply answered yes or no. Zack's response is unusually detailed, and the information given is a somewhat forced inclusion as it does not follow naturally from the question that was asked. Taking into account both the content of this response and its contextual placement, it becomes clear that Zack's claim of the status of minister is somehow important to the framing of his account as a whole, and that it is somehow thematically linked to Edith's illness and their subsequent separation.

The claim of the role of minister is used here as a rhetorical device indicating personal morality as well. It is followed immediately by an abrupt shift in storyline that establishes an important and recurring aspect of Zack's preferred self within the context of the separation: *blamelessness*. Edith left him in 1990, during his tenure as a minister. The causes of this first separation are never explained, nor is any further detail about this period of his marriage given during the course of the interview. This is a striking omission. As I will show later in this work, participants who experience several separations from the same spouse tend to lump these separations together as episodes that share causal links. Attributions are generally given for each subsequent separation and reunion. In this case, the only details presented are that he was a minister at the time, and that his wife left him "in the parsonage." Drawing upon the cultural currency of being a member of the clergy, Zack circumvents the natural assumption that if Edith left him, he

likely did something to cause her to leave. Nor does he acknowledge his role in the separation linguistically. His opening statement is that "she" separated in 1990, a statement that is grammatically incorrect but thematically consistent. He then follows this telling of a first, brief separation with a much longer and richly detailed telling of a separation caused by Edith's mental incapacity. By immediately following the telling of Edith's having left him with a story of her illness, he further invalidates any reasons that she might have had for her previous departure. She is shown to be a person who does not act in her best interests and who is in need of stabilization, so whatever counterclaims might be implied by her earlier actions are not to be trusted.

The salience of this claim is reinforced a few minutes later, as Zack again mentions his former occupation:

> Erica: Okay. Are you currently employed?
>
> Zack: No, I am retired.
>
> Erica: Okay. You were formerly a minister, correct?
>
> Zack: Once a minister, always a minister. (Okay.) But I am a *retired* minister. That's the way I look at it.

In this segment of talk, Zack is specifically claiming the role of minister, despite not currently holding this position professionally. My question about whether he was formerly a minister developed from his earlier statement "I am a minister," which is contradicted by his statement "I am retired." This question places Zack into the position of having to deny his current retired status or lose the ability to claim the ministerial role.

Zack adeptly reiterates his status in such a way that neither of these contradictory statements can be considered deceitful or incorrect. More importantly, he claims that he

will *always* be a minister; the status is irrevocable, and is not being specially claimed for the purposes of the current discussion. The status of minister thus takes on an active and legitimating aspect.

Oddly enough, while Zack mentions several times that he is a minister, none of his stories include content of his work life as a minister or how being a minister impacted his personal life with Edith. Zack states emphatically, "I am a minister," but never specifies *what* makes him a minister when he no longer works in this capacity or *why* he still considers himself to have this status. Ironically, Zack's purpose in claiming this particular status so strongly and so early in the interview becomes clearer when he alludes to a different professional identity:

> Erica: If you had a friend who came to you and said look, it looks like I'm going to separate from my wife, what advice would you give this person?
>
> Zack: I don't . . think I'd give them advice. I'd invite them to ah . . tell me what, tell me their feelings. Like a counselor (laughs).
>
> Erica: Ah (laughs also) Okay
>
> Zack: So ah, it's kind of an overworked phrase, but ah . . I'd say to the effect, something to the effect of do you want to talk about it (Right) that's a, kind of a stereotype phrase but I would invite them to, to ah share their feelings with me if they wanted to tell me about it. And ah, I wouldn't presume to advise them on any course of action for sure.

Although Zack does not specifically claim counselor status as an aspect of his identity, we can see here that he proclaims he would behave "like a counselor" when talking about marital trouble. This allusion serves two purposes. First, it complements his claim to active ministerial status, as minsters may be called upon to counsel their parishioners as part of their duties. Secondly, when this status is considered in conjunction to the status

of minister, a common theme of authority becomes apparent. Both ministers and counselors are sanctioned to evaluate others' actions and motives, and to pronounce what is and is not "healthy" or "proper." By alluding to himself both as minister and counselor, Zack establishes his right to comment upon Edith's illness not only as an estranged spouse, but also as an individual capable of judging her behavior in an impartial and professional manner. The last sentence in Zack's hypothetical counselor narrative further reinforces this professional distancing, as it disclaims any potential suggestion that he might "counsel" a friend improperly by becoming personally involved in the separation decision.

Zack's claims of professionalism, with the traits of distance and authority, are key to his ability to locate complete responsibility for the separation with his wife. Most participants, even those who initiate separation because their spouse has wronged them severely, will accept *some* responsibility for the failure of their marriage, as will be illustrated in the next two accounts. However, in this case the cause of the separation is seen as being completely separate from Zack:

> Erica: If you were going to try to put your separation into a story, if you were going to tell the story of your separation, how would you divide it up into chapters?
>
> (Puzzled look by participant)
>
> Erica: See what I'm saying? If you had to kind of quickly –
>
> Zack: – the early, I would put it in chapters of ah, (clears throat), the early stage, or the ah, first time I found out about her was in 1960 and '61. And then ah, she had a period of . .normality, ah . . about until about 1989, and so that's the second chapter in her illness is about 1890, *19*89, ah, through the present date, continuous.

> Erica: Okay, so the story of your separation actually starts well before you are separated.
>
> Zack: Well, the ah. . . the seeds of it or the ingredients were there. I don't know if they were there all of her life or not. (Right) But ah, her first *signs*, that ah, that I recognized . . were in 1961 and it was very obvious because . . . . she was really.. out of touch with reality . . . . (sighs) and she, she couldn't stop talking, she was, ah, delusional, and paranoid. And I was *afraid* that she would lose her *life* because . . she couldn't settle down to eat . or carry on . . the ah, activities of daily living . . that people have to do, go to the bathroom and . . go to sleep, she sure couldn't sleep. She was ..so *hyper* (okay) and ah, she had shock treatments, and in those days they didn't . . give anesthesia with them. And I, that experience of three months in the hospital, in a mental, ah, ward, might have . . . given her such a bad taste that that she doesn't want to have anything to do with mental health providers.

The first part of Zack's story suggests that his knowledge of Edith's illness, "the first time I found out about her," was the beginning of the end of his marriage. This opening implies that Zack's emotional response factors strongly in the progression of his marital breakup; one expects there to be second and subsequent realizations that push Zack still further emotionally from Edith. The storyline does not continue along this track, however. The original attribution, which focuses briefly on Zack's part in the relationship, is immediately supplanted by recasting "chapters" of the separation as episodes in Edith's illness.

Here Zack locates fault for the separation so thoroughly with Edith's illness that the illness and the separation become interchangeable. His answer to my specific request for a chronologically ordered separation story becomes an illness narrative. This juxtaposition does not need to be inferred; the wording of my question, "put your separation into a story . . . divide it up into chapters," is echoed in the phrase "the second chapter in her illness." By complying with my request for a chaptered story format, while

substituting "illness" for "separation" Zack "answers" my question even as he is telling me that his wife's illness is the only relevant causal factor in this separation.

The attribution is complete when Zack states that the "seeds" of the separation were present from the very beginning of his marriage, possibly for the *entirety of Edith's life*. This statement effectively absolves Zack from any responsibility for the separation, as its root cause is both located outside of the relationship and began prior to his having entered the relationship. Zack's role in the drama changes from one who "finds out about her," implying judgement within the relationship, to one who merely "recognizes" the nature of an already extant problem. His evaluative stance is further refined when he explains, with great emphasis, that he "was *afraid* that she would lose her *life*." Although this statement brings the emphasis of the story back to Zack's emotional response to Edith's illness, the moral implications of the stance chosen are quite different than those of his opening statement. Linguistically, one is "found out" if one does something wrong or has been concealing something unsavory. The information "found out" is then used to reevaluate the original judgement of the individual or situation in question. In contrast, Zack's later stance becomes that of a concerned observer rather than a disappointed spouse. To be afraid for someone implies evaluative judgement, in that it requires the perception that the person is in danger. But, this judgement is done on another's behalf and as such does not suggest intolerance.

Mental illness is seen not only as the cause of this marital separation. In the following passage, the separation itself becomes pathologized through Zack's linguistic choices:

> Erica: Okay. So, how did you tell people, when you became separated? How did you let everyone know that this was going on?
>
> Zack: (Clears throat). Um, usually they would ask me a question, ah, how is [wife's name] or how's she getting along . . I would explain to them that . . . she has mental health problems and that she's not living with me, and ah, that's mostly what I would tell them. And that she's afraid to take medication because she's afraid of side effects. And so she...just really doesn't get along real well because she's not taking anything for her condition.

Here again, Zack locates his position in the separation as blameless. This passage is structured as a habitual narrative (see Riessman, 1990), with the phrase "I would explain to them" implying that this manner of telling became a stock response that Zack used to make his separation public. Both the form and context of this response suggest that Zack immediately links illness to separation in order to minimize his role in having disrupted the marriage. Unlike in the earlier narrative passage where Zack claims authority as a minister, here there is no mention that Zack used the Baker Act to have his wife involuntarily committed. That decision and her reaction to it are the tipping point that Zack identifies earlier; Edith will not return home after she has been released from the hospital. However, in this narrative, the separation sounds almost as though Edith is temporarily "out sick" from the marriage. Zack does not explicitly state that they are separated, merely that she is ill and not living with him. He then reiterates that Edith will not take medicine that would cure her, and by implication allow her to return home. With this choice of words, Zack indicates that the separation effectively belongs to her.

Mental illness thus becomes inextricably bound with the separation experience. As the two blur repeatedly in Zack's account, the "thingness" of each is underscored. In the following passage, mental illness becomes an object that stands between Edith and others:

> Zack: There's a television commercial some years ago, that, that showed a person, I don't know if they were not using a deodorant or something but it showed a plastic *dome* over them. (Okay) So they could be *seen*, but they couldn't be heard and they couldn't get out. They were, pushing against this plastic *dome* that was over them. And people on the outside, they couldn't get to the other person either. And I, I kind of feel that that's our situation now that we're separated . . . from something that. . really keeps us from communicating deeply with each other.
> Erica: Okay. What I'm hearing is, it's almost as though this mental illness is the dome.
>
> Zack: Mm hm.
>
> Erica: Like she's *in* there –
>
> Zack: *Exactly!* That's what I'm trying to say. Yep.

This image of mental illness as an isolating dome again addresses both responsibility for separation and the nature of the separation experience Zack is living. The "dome" ostensibly is clear or transparent, as people on either side can see one another, yet it does not allow communication or escape. Unlike most other passages related to Edith's illness, here Zack removes responsibility from both parties. Edith is in a dome that she *cannot* pass through; this is a departure from the noncompliance talk about her refusal to take medication. The noncompliance storyline describes Edith as living in a prison of her own construction.

The person in the deodorant commercial Zack refers to is described as "pushing" against the dome that traps them, implying effort to remove the barrier. By stating that the mental illness is the dome, Zack restructures the separation as being located outside of both parties' control. This is a more active status than Zack generally grants Edith, who is most often characterized as unwilling to work to become well:

> And when she became stabilized . . they discharged her, and ah, gave her a pres*cript*ion, which I . . *filled* . . and ah, I remember what it cost, it cost *forty-five dollars*, because we've been low income most of the time. And ah... out of my forty-five dollars' . . worth of pills, ah, she, she may have taken one or two. But then again she may *not* have swallowed them. Because she likes to hide them (smiling and gesturing to side of cheek). Trick [unclear], pretend that she's taking it, and, and she's not really taking them. (Right) So I don't know if she took *any* of them. But then she stopped and said, Nope, I'm not going to take any more.

Noncompliance with treatment and refusal of treatment are recurrent themes in Zack's account. He is accomplishing more with this passage than simply relating Edith's stubbornness and his resulting frustration, however. This story begins with his wife "when she became stabilized" after hospitalization. As an inpatient, she had been medicated despite her wishes. The wife of this story does not have the excuse of mental illness to explain away noncompliance, nor can she plead ignorance about her condition and its proper treatment.

Edith is thus fully accountable for her actions, which are portrayed here as tricky, selfish, and deceitful. This passage contains one of the few instances of "we" in Zack's account, in the phrase "we've been low income most of the time." That Edith experienced married life in a low income bracket implies that she understood that medical costs such as prescriptions would be a financial strain on their budget.

Still she does not take the pills. This refusal is both financial irresponsibility and marital rejection. Zack's role in her treatment is characterized here as being extremely important. The word "filled" is set off from the rest of the talk by pauses of two seconds and is also highlighted by being emphasized through tone and volume, as is the amount paid to fill the prescription. Filling the prescription is important in this narrative, as it

illustrates Zack's active effort and sacrifice. When Edith balks, she rejects not her own prescription or her own medicine but "*my* forty-five dollars . . worth of pills" (emphasis mine), and in doing so invalidates her husband's contribution.

The manner of her rejection is relevant, as is Zack's telling of it. According to Zack, it is impossible for him to know how many pills she actually took; hypothetically speaking, she may have taken none. At this point in the narrative, Zack slips into the habitual mode of narrative: "she likes to hide them . . . pretend that she's taking it." Within this context, Edith regularly tends to evade censure for her noncompliance by trying to fool the person who helps with her illness. The extent of her efforts to thwart becoming well are underscored here, as is her culpability in the resulting separation. By gesturing to his cheek to illustrate *how* she hides the pills, and by smiling when he does so, Zack softens this indictment. The act of hiding pills becomes a childish prank rather than a hurtful deception.

Edith, in this account, has a dual nature. She is childlike and helpless in the face of her illness. This characterization elicits protection; one cannot expect too much from a helpless child and must shield her from harm. At the same time, she is an adult with the ability to contribute to her wellness, which she refuses to do. These circumstances place Zack in a torturous position. He cannot effectively change Edith's behavior or influence her willingness to comply with a treatment regimen. Nor can he fix the problem that separates them without her active participation. She, however, is not able to make an informed choice regarding her health because she is not mentally stable enough to comprehend the impact of her decision to remain unmedicated. If Edith were terminally

ill, or suffering dementia that was irreversible such as Alzheimer's disease, Zack could more easily mourn Edith's passing before the actual death of her body. Because Edith's condition is treatable with medication, this sense of closure eludes Zack. He may someday have his spouse once again, but in the mean time is left to wait in limbo for "something" to change his circumstances. In this next narrative, Zack describes how a woman of his acquaintance received medicine for a physical condition, neuropathy, which turned out to be effective against her psychological disorder as a happy side effect. Zack cannot hope that Edith will choose to take medicine for her psychological disorder, so he hopes for a similarly fortunate accidental treatment:

> But, the medicine that she's giving her for *neuropathy* . . helps the bipolar condition (Interviewer wow.) And so I've been waiting for something, a breakthrough like that, say like for example if my wife developed . . *neuropathy* . . she'd be given a medicine for *neuropathy*. And she would accept *that*, because it's a physical thing and not mental. (Okay) So I've been waiting for something like that to happen. Or I've been waiting for one of us to *die*, and ah . . . I, I don't like my living in limbo, and being . . in between, being married and not-married. But um, I haven't wanted to take that step, it seems like a *cruel* thing to do. Although not providing for me what I need is cruel to me.

If it can be assumed that a medicine might improve Edith's symptoms through luck, it is reasonable to expect that a medicine prescribed specifically for these symptoms would likely be effective. This narrative combines several traits of Zack's separated identity. Blamelessness and helplessness are present, as is a frustrated desire to "fix" the problem.

Here the recurrent theme of caring takes on additional meaning as well. Edith will likely remain ill. As Zack cannot cure Edith or bring her to someone who can treat her, he is left with the choice of staying in the marriage and thus being in "limbo" which is "cruel"

to him, or leaving the marriage and being "cruel" to his wife. In this narrative, Zack breaks into the hypothetical narrative form (see Riessman, 1990), and presents two alternatives that would release him from marital limbo. Either she would be cured by accident, or one of them could die. In juxtaposing two hypothetical scenarios in this manner, Zack reestablishes Edith's illness as *her* problem, but *his* burden. Divorce is not provided as an option; he has chosen a protective stance towards Edith, and this would hurt her. In the first instance, reunion is the implied outcome. Ostensibly, finding an accidental cure would also cure the marital disruption. In the second hypothetical instance, death, the marital link is permanently broken through no fault of Zack's.

At first glance, the concept of death does not fit well within the proposed identity of "healer." If we unpack the expectations of health, illness, and death from the perspective of a health professional, the correspondence becomes more clear. A health professional is responsible only for the *effort* to promote health and cure illness in another. So long as all proper, reasonable actions are taken to meet this goal, a negative outcome does not relate "fault." The illness itself "belongs" to the other, and the outcome of the illness – whether wellness or death – affects the healer only tangentially. At the same time, the death of the patient releases the caregiver from his or her role.

Later in his account, Zack returns to the theme of death in describing the marriage itself. In this passage, the marriage itself has *already* died. With this characterization, Zack not only avoids all responsibility for the separation, but characterizes the marriage in such a way that there can be no "real" separation:

> Zack: Oh, there's . . there's this de facto separation, there's no de facto marriage, I mean um, our marriage I think is dead, I think it is dead. Um, when I first began to face that, I ah, saw a nature program on television. I like to watch uh . . on the PBS on Sunday nights at eight, they have these nature programs? (Okay) One was about . . some apes, and how they raise their children. How the mothers took care of the babies and nurtured them, and . . ah . . .. So the mothers were nurturing their, their babies, that the newborn babies. But one of the mothers had a *stillborn* baby, and ah, she didn't seem to know what to do with it. I don't know if you saw that episode, she, she held it to herself –
>
> Erica: Carried it around with her –
>
> Zack: – carried it around with her, and she ah, she rocked it, she held it, she shook it, and she ah, she hugged it and tried to feed it and . . um, she didn't accept the fact that the baby was dead. (Mm hm) She was trying to treat the baby like the other mothers were treating their babies. And um, finally ah, after several *days*, I don't know if it began to smell or what, it told her that the baby was dead. She uh, put it on a rock somewhere and left it there, and just went away and left and . . and she was like, just in a daze, wandering around . . depressed and everything, and ah . . I compare myself to that ah, monkey, that mother, who ah, had a dead child, and ah . . held onto it, and didn't, didn't ah, leave it. (Mm hm) And ah, I did that way for a lot of years of our marriage, when it was . . crashing and . . I wasn't wanting to notice then and wasn't wanting to accept that and . . . but then she kept having these, ah . . . episodes of paranoia, and . . the, being ah, ah, out of touch with reality.

Because there is no "de facto" marriage in this narrative, the separation experienced by Zack and Edith becomes one of physical proximity only. In this telling, there can be no stigma associated with the status of being separated. The emotionally laden expectations of typical separation – that somewhere in the mix one will find betrayal, estrangement, and mutual unkindness – are made irrelevant.

The death of Zack's marriage and his role in its passing are also illustrative of Zack's preferred self. This segment of talk is what I have termed a frame story, or a narrative encapsulating a story for the purposes of "framing" its larger meaning. In telling

me that he considers his marriage to be dead, Zack inserts a story of a televised nature show about monkey mothers and their babies. This is an unusual choice, as nature imagery is not used in any other place in his account, nor are monkeys an easily understood symbol for marital union. In comparing himself to the mother monkey, Zack jumps both gender and species in his placement of his role. The allegory of the monkey works in this context, however, as the story contains all of the elements Zack needs to "wrap up" his separated self.

In this story, the monkey is a very sympathetic character who suffers a great loss through no fault of her own, reaffirming a sense of blamelessness. Still, she continually makes hopeless attempts to "fix" what cannot be remedied. At this point in his narrative, Zack works to involve me in his construction. As he positions the story to move into the area of caregiving, he asks me if I have also seen the show. By chance I had, and I replied in the manner prompted by the structure of his question; I reaffirmed that the mother monkey tried to nurture her dead infant. Having received validation, Zack continues on in this same vein by detailing all of the many ways the mother monkey tries to treat the dead baby as if it were alive and well.

By setting himself up as this mother monkey, Zack is able to claim that he did everything he could in a hopeless situation, and that he continued on with efforts to save his marriage long after its demise should have been obvious. His efforts at resuscitation failed because there were factors outside of his control and responsibility that doomed the union. It is interesting to note that in this story within a story, there is no corresponding role for Edith. Zack is the mother monkey, the marriage is the dead infant, and no one in

the story is to blame for the tragedy. As Zack leaves this example and re-enters the framing narrative, Edith's illness and her lack of compliance are again brought to the fore. In this one story, Zack touches upon all of the elements that he has incorporated into his preferred self: blamelessness, caring, and a frustrated attempt to heal the union.

The larger conversational context of this frame story helps to explain why a summative tale was required. About five minutes before Zack began the monkey frame story, I asked him if he dated during separation. He told me that he had had several serious relationships (although he would not "go to bed" with these women), and that they had ended badly because he was still legally tied to Edith. In one of these relationships he considered possibly marrying the woman he was dating, and the breakup had lead him to consider divorce "necessary" prior to beginning his next serious relationship.

This scenario presents a very different potential self than the one that Zack has worked so hard to establish. Instead of being a man who was separated because of his wife's illness, Zack's account has slipped into that of a husband who regretted not divorcing his "helpless" and "ill" spouse in order to marry the woman he has been dating during his wife's infirmity. Linguistically, Zack has thrown his previous narrative into question. He then works quickly to re-establish his preferred self, and elicits my participation as verification that his effort is accepted.

Sara's Account: A Contested Self

My interview with Sara was the only one conducted at a participant's residence. She and I had corresponded by telephone several times and had scheduled and re-scheduled our appointment more than once. Sara's life as a newly-single mother of two

adolescents was extremely busy, and our interview had to be squeezed in between personal and familial activities.

I arrived at the house, and the moment I stepped out of my car I could hear a large dog barking. This made me uncomfortable; I worried both that the dogs would not be friendly and that they would be too loud for me to record our conversation. Before I reached the door, Sara opened it while holding a dog by the collar. She explained that the dog was friendly, perhaps overly so, and would need to be put in another room. As she led the dog away I stepped into the entry room of the house, which branched into a family room, dining room, and kitchen.

Sara was dressed for a summer morning at home, wearing a t-shirt and shorts. Her dark hair was cut short, and she wore plain silver earrings. She was short compared to my own height of five foot seven. We sat down at a smallish, round dining table that was covered with a clear plastic mat and stood on a plastic carpet protector. I noticed a framed picture of her and her estranged spouse, whom I will call Norman, on the top of the sideboard next to the table. This object would come to take on greater significance for me during the interview. Her account continually elicited a projected "self" from me as I listened and thought, *If I were her, no way would I have been so nice about things.* That Sara did not express extreme anger in her narrative, and did not castigate Norman, seemed almost *too* nice. As I will show, Sara did not use easily available resources for portraying Norman in a negative manner because her sense of "self" within the separation depends in large part on "who" her husband was during the marriage and after.

I began to set up my interview equipment, and gave two copies of my consent form for her to sign. A loud comment, seemingly made in response to something playing on television, came from the next room. As it turns out, we would experience interference during the interview but not from the dogs. Sara's daughter was also at home. I had not intended to involve anyone but the participant in any of my interviews, and so I asked if we should reschedule. Sara said no, that her daughter whom I will call Kimberly would spend the time watching television before leaving for a summer session of school.

Sara then suggested that I should interview Kimberly. I explained that I did not have review board clearance to interview minors, who constitute a vulnerable population, and that getting this clearance tended to be involved and difficult. Kimberly protested being left out, and suggested to me that I go back to the review board to get clearance. Her mother argued with her that I was here now and so I would have to interview her alone.

The two of them then came to a compromise as I sat watching their negotiations. Sara determined that her daughter had important information and a unique viewpoint and so should be able to contribute, but that she should do so by proxy. Kimberly agreed to provide subject prompts if her mother "forgot" something or left something out. Sara then explained to Kimberly that she should talk to *her*, and she would then relate this same information to me.

As I sat at the small table with my feet resting on the crackly plastic sheet, I decided that this research setting was impossibly complicated, but that I would stay to see how the interview proceeded. In making my decision, I made a distinction that I explained

to both Sara and Kimberly. I would ask questions only of Sara, and make comments and eye contact only to Sara. I would treat Kimberly as if she were not present. I secretly hoped that her mother would take this cue to heart and also ignore her daughter's input during the process, so that Kimberly would lose interest and leave us to the standard one-on-one interview format I was comfortable with.

This did not happen. It became clear quite early in the interview that Kimberly, with or without her mother's approval, was going to be an active participant in her mother's account. I continued to ignore her, but instead of this having the hoped-for effect of excluding Kimberly from the interview, it established *two* dyadic communication settings. Sara and I spoke about her separation experience. Kimberly and Sara also spoke about the separation to one another, alternately supporting one another's accounts and presenting competing storylines. The two argued when their accounts did not match, and each attempted to convince the other that *their* version was the "real" story.

I was left out of this form of talk by virtue of my decision not to comment upon or question Kimberly's offerings. As I will show, my self-imposed exclusion became a resource for Sara, who knew that I would not be able to reiterate her daughter's narrative. Sara was thus able to remain in control of the direction of the talk; as the only conversational participant with access to both linguistic dyads, she could move in and out of several lines of story production. She guided my questions to a larger extent than did most participants in our collaborative story of the separation process, she provided a steady stream of detailed sole-authored stories, and she alternately drew upon and played against her daughter's narrative in further establishing her own account.

While this drama was unfolding, I worried about how to present the data I was getting. I did not have permission to interview minors, as I have already stated. My original intent was to transcribe the tape as though Kimberly had not contributed. Once I began the transcription process, it became clear that this was not possible. Nor was I able to present only Sara's chunks of narrative and paraphrases of the content of Kimberly's contributions. Either option leaves chunks of talk that dangle without subject referents or conversational context, and analysis becomes impossible.

This section of my analysis therefore draws upon entire segments of data comprised of talk by myself, Sara, and Kimberly. I made the decision to include Kimberly's talk verbatim based upon several factors. First, despite my full disclosure of my research constrictions Kimberly participated with her mother present and thus had at least implicit parental permission to contribute. Secondly, she was not a young child at the time of the interview. Had Kimberly been a young child, I would not have been comfortable with her presence in the house during the interview whether or not she contributed due to the likely subject matter of her mother's talk. Kimberly was nearly seventeen at the time of the interview. Finally, although I present talk from Kimberly, I neither recruited her participation nor reacted toward her in any way during the interview process.

Whether or not Kimberly had been present during the interview process, her "story" would have factored strongly in her mother's account. Early in the interview, Sara establishes that her marital separation is not a story of a marital breakup but the breakup of a family:

Erica: Okay, and how long have you been separated?

Sara: He left us last . . . . . June sixteenth. 'S a little over a year.

Sara's marital separation experience, and the self produced by the experience, is produced within a familial context that shapes her stories throughout the narrative. My question specified "you" as the separation context, and was designed to elicit an individual response, such as "I have been separated for four years." This participant is the only one to answer with a collective response that makes her separation into an "us" experience, although she is not the only mother with children who experienced separation.

Because Sara includes her children in the separating parties, the separation not only happens to "us" but also the separation *account* is subject to collective telling. Most of my participants noted that their separation experience was extremely distressing especially at first. As a result, most controlled how information was given out through selectively notifying key persons or waiting until these key persons asked or brought up a related subject. Sara is a notable exception to this pattern of maintaining informational control. Although she is similarly reluctant to speak about her experience until the initial shock of the breakup wears off, she seems to actively encourage her daughter's notification of family:

Erica: And, when you tell certain people, how did you tell the news to your adult family members?

Sara: (Laughs) My daughter did.

Erica: Oh yeah?

> Sara: Yeah. Um. (Speaking as daughter character) Daddy left us! Um. how .. . I didn't say much, I waited for people to ask me. First few days I wasn't doing real well and . . I just didn't want to say anything.
>
> Erica: Right. Right.
>
> Sara: My daughter was an excellent spokesman.
>
> Erica: Okay, and you didn't . . tell your children, they were here and . .
>
> Sara: They didn't, we walked into the house and we had just returned from a trip from New York, and there was an envelope in the kitchen and my daughter got to it first. So she saw it before anybody else, and she started screaming. And then I read it, and we realized that my husband had left.

In this segment of talk, Sara takes on her daughter's voice in relating how the separation notice was made to family. Again, the separation is cast in a collective manner; it is not so much a marital separation, parting spouses, as a family disruption that takes away both husband and father.

As the interview progressed, Sara would have reason to regret her decision to relate the separation as a collective experience. For a coherent self to be constructed in talk, potential competing selves must be kept at bay; I have to show you why I am *this* person specifically, even though other selves might fit my circumstances if not my preference. Sara's construction of self never developed as fully as did that of other participants, because her daughter's competing account recasts all players in the this family drama. Although Kimberly's talk focused mainly on her father and her perceptions of his many shortcomings, by re-presenting Norman in this manner she shifts her mother's role in both the marriage and in the process of separation. Despite this rhetorical challenge, Sara continually attempts to establish and reaffirm what I term the magnanimous self. This self is a self in contrast, defined largely by what the narrator

chooses to avoid. There can be no sense of bitterness, cruelty, neglect, inattention, or outright blame for the magnanimous self to be coherently presented. Instead, Sara highlights her fairness and lack of judgement as she simultaneously presents Norman's faults and avoids using these faults to disparage him.

In some of the earliest lengthy segments of narrative, Sara attempts to dampen negative perceptions of Norman that might logically follow from her original story of abandonment. This is an awkward undertaking, as can be seen by the inconsistencies and contradictions in this segment of Sara's account:

> Erica: Can you tell me how the separation, how it progressed, what the . . process was, I guess? It seems very abrupt.
>
> Sara: Oh, it was. My husband and I grew apart as the years went by, um . . . . . we sort of . . started living separate lives. I was always involved with my children, he was always very much involved with his business, and that's how it went for the last few years. And um . . . different things led up to his making his decision, I'm sure. *But.* (Pause of eleven seconds) I guess he tried to spare us and felt he could do that best by . . making an abrupt departure, and the best time to do that was when I had the kids up in New York visiting his family and mine. 'Cause we did not know anything until we came back. In retrospect I can look and so many things make sense, but at the time of course I didn't see it.

In this narrative passage, Sara repeats and then immediately discounts my suggestion that her separation experience was abrupt. Sara's response "oh yes, it was" is contradicted by the next sentence "my husband and I grew apart as the years went by." This suggestion of a slow, passively occurring estrangement is reinforced by the phrase "separate lives," which uses the root word "separate" within the context of marriage rather than separation. Rhetorically, Sara has revised her early story of abandonment with a new narrative thread in which the separation occurred as an unfortunate side effect of both partners' attentions

elsewhere. In this set-up for her revision, since the two spouses' lives are separate during the marriage, the "separation" is not the point of breakup. No one actively does the leaving.

The story coherence is challenged when Sara tries to reintroduce the topic of Norman's departure within this revised context. The "different things" leading up to her husband's "decision" are not explored, nor does she mention his physical leaving at this point. This sentence exemplifies the "language of smokescreens and evasions," as it is an attempt to downplay what Sara does not want explored. (see Rogers et al., 1999) By examining the nature of what is being skirted in this talk, the bases of Norman's decision to leave, it becomes obvious that in this narrative Sara wishes to avoid direct attribution of fault and description of marital problems. Again, the issue of fault is ambiguous.

It is only after a transitional device, a stressed "but" followed by a pause of eleven seconds, that the specific topic of leaving is reintroduced. This transitional device is critical to understanding the basis of Sara's self that is being produced in talk. The "but" is not used as a lead-in to revision talk, as the pause that follows it is astonishingly long and implies the taking up of a new topical focus. Instead, "but" is used here as a emphatic stop indicating that the line of talk that would otherwise lead to discussion of cause and motives will not be continued. This section of talk is the first instance of many where Sara makes a claim of magnanimity. The implication is that she *could* discuss Norman's motives and possible reasons, but will not.

The long pause that follows this section of the narrative suggests careful thought about what to tell next and how to phrase its telling. Instead of taking up the available

topic of abandonment, Sara positions Norman's sudden departure as being not only benign but kind. The suggestion that coming home to a "dear Joan" letter after a family vacation is the result of being "spared" is so unusual that it reads as an inversion of its content, implying the exact opposite is true without requiring the speaker to make an uncharitable comment.

Sara's desire to be seen as an exemplary divorcing woman is made plain later in her account, when she constructs herself as "atypical" in comparison to the typical woman going through a divorce. By outlining the usual "female divorce category" and playing against it, Sara can boast about her own positive traits while at the same time indirectly criticizing Norman:

> Sara: (Pause of about ten seconds) . . I think I've very atypical in the female divorce category, number one because . . I don't hate my husband. Number two, I'm financially okay, and that's another rarity. Three, I've got . . my kids, my family, my *husband's* family on my side. You know, I, I have support from everyone, so I haven't had as hard a time as most women would. I mean there were some difficult times, there were *certainly* times that I was crying, and upset but I haven't had what I think a lot of women go through. So it, it's hard for me to say. I've been very lucky.
>
> Erica: When you say that you've got your husband's family on your side, how does that play out? That's very interesting.
>
> Sara: My husband's father told me that . . .he was on my side when um, my husband left he was furious with him. And my aunt, my husband's aunt, these are the only two relatives he has, also *furious* at him. They don't like his behavior, um, but they can't do anything about it. And I stay in touch with both of them, my husband doesn't call his family. I don't know why. Well he just, he's not a, he's not a . . he's not a (to daughter: take your pills!) . . .he's not a, um, family-oriented person, he concentrates on the business. He doesn't understand the feeling part of it and that is a big – (daughter interrupts, mumbling). Yeah, my husband never took any time off, my kids always regretted that ..

In this narrative, the typical woman who is divorcing is poor, hates her husband, and receives blame for the breakup from at least some family members. It is this typical image of divorce that Sara works against in her account. Her financial status does not figure strongly in the rest of her narratives, which is not surprising as Sara does not need to verbally claim a middle-class standard of living during the interview. Her home and possessions adequately suggest a person who is not living hand to mouth.

The other two claims, that Sara does not hate her husband and that everyone is on her side, are critical elements in Sara's construction of a magnanimous self. If Sara were to strongly and openly express criticism toward Norman, it would be impossible for her to structure her story using "objective" phrases and content. By averring that she does not hate her husband, Sara is telling her audience that she has no reason to slander him or intentionally try to harm him. She will not act in "typical" divorcing woman fashion, dredging up all of the negative points of the spouse in a one-sided rehash of events.

Since Sara cannot do the criticizing directly, she relies on others who are "on my side" to do so. In describing their reactions to Norman's behavior in this and other segments of narrative, Sara is able to establish Norman as worthy of criticism without losing her position as magnanimous wife willing to make an objective account. Here, the others who do the criticism are "my *husband's* family" and "the only two relatives he has." The implication here is that if *anyone* were to be on Norman's "side" it would be his relatives, and both of his living relatives are "furious" at his actions. Therefore, his actions must be seen as terrible and shameful because these relatives would not denounce him if it were not so.

Sara has to tread lightly here. Norman cannot be too sympathetic a character in her account, but at the same time he cannot be painted as a horrible human being. Sara's preliminary efforts to claim to a magnanimous self will be derailed if her husband is perceived as being *too* lousy a spouse. There is a fine line between being trusting and magnanimous, and being naive and subservient. If the portrayal of Norman approaches the extreme of "bad spouse," it brings new meaning to Sara's self both inside the marriage and during the separation.

This duality is illustrated most clearly when Kimberly's contribution impinges upon Sara's stories. Kimberly interrupts frequently when she perceives that her mother is letting Norman off too easily for his many sins, including having had an affair with his secretary Alicia. She takes control of the narrative at these points by demanding that her mother tell me just how terrible Norman has been. Sometimes her interjections are a single-line revision of Sara's telling, and sometimes they involve forcing a small segment of narrative into the middle of her mother's story in progress.

Sara manages these interruptions in two ways. First, she weaves her daughter's attention deficit disorder into the conversation. The daughter therefore has only provisional status as a narrator, and is not to be automatically granted the same level of believability that a narrator who is not excitable and "hyper" might be given. In one instance, this is used in a direct bid to explain her daughter's insistence on contributing to the interview; when her daughter does not take subtle cues to exit the narrative in one story, her mother cuts her off and then apologizes to me that Kimberly is "not on her Ritalin."

Another means for Sara to reassert control of the narrative is to highlight her role as parent. Often when Kimberly interjects, her mother actively sanctions her by "shushing" her or giving her a mildly threatening glance, two behaviors that could not be used easily by one adult against another:

> Sara: Yes, when I did get the letter I went to my husband's office. First I called, and um . . . . they said he's busy, of course they're going to say that. I said, I'm coming out, I told the kids to stay here, I went out to the office. And, he's a [professional], I went out and he was busy when I got there, I said I'll sit in your office and I'll wait for you. And . . (sound of daughter making shuffling and knocking sounds from kitchen area) I know, she can guess that that's him. (To daughter) Quiet. Anyway, uh . . . I waited and waited, he came back in the room and I asked him, I said what's going on.
>
> Kimberly: — His secretary was going on!
>
> Sara: (to daughter) Shhh! (To interviewer) What's going on, and he said, um . . he didn't really want to talk about it, he thought it would be best if I went home. I said are you *coming* home, are you away for a *day*, are you away for a few days? And um . . he just, I said is there a chance for reconciliation? Now we had been through counseling. But . . . (daughter mumbles, words unclear) My husband, he's . . . he's also opinionated, but he - -
>
> Kimberly: He hasn't done dick for me --
>
> Sara: (To daughter) SSHH! Now–
>
> Kimberly: (To mother) Say that!
>
> Sara: He's opinionated, but he doesn't change his mind if he thinks he's right. He's right, and everybody else is wrong. So we went to the counseling, and it, it really did not help. Um . . . I went home, oh I said where are you staying? I said are you staying with Mike, he has a very good friend and he said, no. And then it dawned on me, his . . office secretary– (daughter breaks in with secretary's name) who ah . . . he, she's been just tremendous in helping his office grow and become efficient, and he always was friendly with her, and they went to meetings together and, you know, fine. (Sniffs.)(Daughter attempts to talk over, mother's volume increases slightly to drown her out) I said are you with Alicia and he (to daughter): SSHH! I said–

> Kimberly: If she had a problem, he would go support her in front of her father [unclear].
>
> Sara: Right, okay.
>
> Kimberly: He went south with her for a couple of days, just the two of them–
>
> Sara (in warning tone, to daughter): All right.
>
> Kimberly: And so–
>
> Sara: (to daughter) You know, I'm not up to it. You distract me, I can't think. Hold on. Um.
>
> Kimberly: What were you saying?
>
> Sara: I asked him where he was staying and he said that . . . . he said he wasn't going to discuss it, and then I realized, well, if he's not going to discuss it then he's hiding something. I said, well you're staying with Alicia, aren't you? He wouldn't tell me. Okay. So I had no idea but I had a suspicion.

Although Sara is able to cut off her daughter's interjections, they still have a striking impact on the overall efficacy of the narrative. This passage is Sara's attempt to present a temporally ordered story about how she discovered Norman's motive for leaving the family. The story takes the listener step by step through Sara's actions, first calling the office, then going to see Norman in person, then asking about his intent in leaving, and so on. By narrating in this fashion, Sara presents herself as being flexible, level-headed, and resilient. There is no mention of her becoming hysterical or accusatory despite Norman's abrupt departure.

As part of this self-construction, Sara stories a sense of not-knowing into the narrative. First she asks if Norman is only gone for a short period of time, and then she questions him about friends he could be staying with. The implication in this talk is multi-

layered. Sara establishes first that she had no sense that there were serious problems in the relationship that would lead to the permanent breakup of the marriage ("I said are you *coming* home, are you away for a *day*, are you away for a few days? And um . . he just, I said is there a chance for reconciliation?"). Secondly, Sara's mention of counseling suggests that she had already taken steps to alleviate those problems that she was aware of and that any resulting failures are not due to her inattentiveness or lack of effort. Finally, when Sara makes the transition from not knowing about her husband's extramarital affair to knowing – "I went home, oh I said where are you staying? I said are you staying with Mike, he has a very good friend and he said, no. And then it dawned on me, his . . office secretary–" – it is done in a way that lets her audience know that she had not had any suspicions at all prior to this event.

This last point is again reinforced when Sara praises Alicia as having been supportive of Norman and good for his business. That Norman and Alicia were "friendly" and "went to meetings together" was "fine" within this context. An alternative reading of this situation is that Norman's being "friendly" with Alicia and traveling out of town with her are signs of an affair that Sara might have picked up on if she had been more observant. Since Sara has earlier established that the two of them had grown apart and that she was "involved with my children," she must position her not knowing of the affair in a way that does not suggest neglect of the relationship.

Kimberly continually tries to wrest control of this narrative and push her mother into storying Norman as a cheating louse. In doing so, she unravels several important parts of her mother's self-construction. Her mother's question to Norman, "what is going

on," is answered "His secretary was going on!," implying that Sara's not knowing of the affair is a blatant oversight rather than a sign of trust within the relationship. This same conflict of meaning comes to the fore again when Kimberly brings up Norman's out of town travel with Alicia, "He went south with her for a couple of days, just the two of them–." The effect of this wording is markedly different than "they went to meetings together" as it underscores the sexual intent of the trip. This calls Sara's claim to not knowing into serious question. If a teenage daughter realizes the implications of Norman leaving town alone with Alicia, these interruptions imply, how does her mother not suspect that something might be amiss?

Sara resorts to an overt bid for confirmation from Kimberly to help her reestablish her story as the primary narrative in this instance. By saying "you distract me, I can't think," she prompts Kimberly to reestablish where *she* was in her own story. Kimberly's response, "what were you saying," allows Sara to reestablish that she realized about the affair when talking with her husband after his departure. Only after Norman refuses to answer does she even suspect: "So I had no idea but I had a suspicion."

Sara also uses this same prompt in her interactions with me as interviewer. In this next passage, Sara and Kimberly disagree over the way that Norman should be characterized. Sara's story tells of a man who has the positive traits of helpfulness, frugality, and respect. This man is one who Sara can have a "fine relationship" with, despite his infidelity and abandonment. Even after he leaves the family, he continues to contribute small kindnesses like picking up mail and doing odd jobs around the house. Again, we see Sara taking on the role of a supportive, magnanimous woman who chooses

not to dwell on her spouses indiscretions and shortcomings. Kimberly's contributions, in contrast, show Norman as a cheap, neglectful, disloyal person. If Kimberly's version is given primacy, then by extension Sara cannot be in a "fine relationship" after a remarkably amicable separation under difficult circumstances:

> Sara: He would – (daughter interrupts, mumbling) he would come . . . he is, he can fix anything. I am the world's worst clod, I break and I, I can't put two things together and he knew this. So, periodically during the summer, once a month or so, he works only half a day on Friday, he would come over and fix whatever I broke, and he's done this–
>
> Kimberly: And my mom wants to explain the reasoning *behind* this, is that he didn't do it because . . he was doing it out of *kindness*, he did it because he has to *pay* for it. Since he's the owner of the house –
>
> Sara (to daughter): –SSHHH! Forget about it!
>
> Kimberly: he's a very, very frugal person–
>
> Sara (to daughter): — We'll get to that! Shush! (Daughter mumbles) Um. .
>
> Kimberly: We've never been on a vacation–
>
> Sara: —SSSSHHHHH! . . . What was I saying?
>
> Erica: He fixes houses, he fixed the house.
>
> Sara: Yes, he fixes everything. So he came over about once a month, would bring me my mail, I mean . . . we have a . . fine relationship between . . he and I, I mean . .
> Kimberly: (to mother): It is not fine.
>
> Sara (to daughter): It is fine!
>
> Kimberly: (to mother): It's really sad if you think it's fine. He doesn't like you, he likes Alicia.
>
> Sara: We can interact without arguing now, we get along better than we did. (To daughter) Of *course* he likes Alicia better –

Kimberly: (to mother): But it's not like a *kind* relationship, it's like a *business* relationship.

Sara (to daughter): Yes! (Daughter mumbles) It's respectful.

Kimberly: (to mother): – Here are your [unclear], I'm gone.

Sara: —Shhhh! . . . . . Um . . . . . what were we saying again? I get lost very easily, I'm sorry.

I: It's okay. No, it's okay. Ah, you were saying that now you've gotten to the point where you've got a fine relationship as far as you don't fight . .

Kimberly's suggestion that this post-separation interaction is "like a *business* relationship" suggests that the personal element is gone from her parents' interaction. Norman is being self-serving, even as he "helps" around the house. That her mother does not realize the "true" nature of this interaction is cast as "sad." Sara's preferred self comes under direct attack in this version of events. Her judgement is questioned, and her interpretations are portrayed as faulty and pitiful.

Sara must quickly establish her version of events as the story of record, which she does by appealing directly to me in my role as researcher. Unlike the previous example where she prompts Kimberly to reestablish her narrative as central to the account of the separation, here Sara cannot involve her daughter. Kimberly has been too detailed and bold in her offerings. She cannot adequately revise her story to support that of her mother's, as any attempt may be heard as the untrustworthy product of parental coercion. Instead, Sara asks me where she was in her narrative. By asking "what was *I* saying again" and "what were *we* saying" (emphases mine), Sara tells me that her narrative is the one that should be accepted as the real story of events. This is an effective strategy. My

task is to return the narrative to its "proper" place by reiterating Sara's storyline, which I fulfill by reinforcing Norman's helpfulness ("he fixed the house") and the positive nature of their post-separation interaction ("you've got a fine relationship").

Because of the tenuous nature of Sara's preferred self in this account, she must adroitly position all of the players in the drama of her separation. The "magnanimous" self is a difficult role for her to choose within the biographical constraint of being left for Alicia. The storyline available to Sara, if handled improperly, may easily slip from one of growth and fairness in the face of adversity to one of disregard and naivete. The other players in the drama, Norman and Alicia, must be sympathetic enough that Sara's trust and lack of foresight are understandable, but not so sympathetic that her account rings false.

This balancing act is especially evident in Sara's story of a trip she took to Miami. During this trip, she witnessed interaction between Norman and Alicia yet did not pick up on possible signs that the relationship was not strictly professional. Alicia's father had died, and Sara and Norman were taking her to meet her son in Miami. The trio took two cars, with Norman and Alicia in one and Sara following in another:

> Sara: But anyway, I was behind, and they were speeding up to the point where I was losing them. And I knew if I got lost in Orlando I was going to get in big trouble because I couldn't find my way out of anything. And we *fiiiinally* stopped off somewhere and I remember I was *fuming* and I . . yelled at my husband in front of Alicia, which I never do. I said, what is *wrong* with you? I said, you *know* I'd agreed to do this because I knew Alicia needed, you know, help to get down to Miami. I . . just . . *let* him have it. It, it was wrong of me but I was *so* angry, this was, was the first time I was going down by myself . . . Anyway, um, and then Alicia hooked up with her son and somehow the two of them went down but I know *other* times . . Alicia has a pacemaker, she's young, she's only one month younger than me?

Erica: Mm hm.

Sara: And . . [husband] takes her down to Miami–

Kimberly: – She did drugs, she was a whore, she was known around [hometown]. (Mother gives daughter dirty look) She was! It's, it's true. She does not have the best–

Sara: She's conservative now, in her past she may have been a little more active.

Kimberly: Use your imagination!

Sara: Um . . . . . what was I going to say?

Erica: You were telling me she has a pacemaker.

Sara: She has a pacemaker, and [husband] would take her down, when she got–

Kimberly (under her breath): *–Bitch!*

Sara: –the pacemaker, [husband] took her . . down there, to Miami, that's where her father's family lived. And she had the pacemaker down there. They both stayed with her family.

Kimberly: (in mocking tone): They *stayed* with her *faamily*.

Sara: You know and I thought . . . I thought, you know, she, she doesn't have anyone here, the daughter she can't depend on, the son was away at school. So of *course* I felt, you know, go *help* her.

Erica: Mm hm.

Sara: I, I wouldn't *hesitate*. But you know, now in retrospect I wonder . . was it anything more –

Erica: Right.

Sara: – than him driving down there? Or what? I dunno.

In this lengthy narrative, Sara is able to bolster her sense of the magnanimous self despite her daughter's objections. It is important to note that this narrative, although

contested, is a summative story. There is a lack of expressed bitterness, cruelty, neglect, inattention, and outright blame, while at the same time there is a sense of fairness and objectivity in the face of a difficult situation. The first section of the story sets up a situation where Sara's subsequent expression of anger is justified; she is driving alone to Miami for the first time, and is afraid of becoming horribly lost. It is within this context, that she may become lost, that she becomes "furious" with Norman for driving too quickly and leaving her behind. There is no mention here of the unusual configuration of car occupants, which splits up a married couple and positions Sara as an extra driver.

By contextualizing her anger in this way, Sara can avoid the perception of being the "type" of person who becomes angry or suspicious with her spouse. She furthers this point in her qualifying phrase about yelling at Norman, "which I never do," and later in the statement "it was wrong of me." This story is related as an atypical example of behavior, and as such relates information both about this one episode and all other interactions between Sara and Norman.

Sara's choice of detailed illustration here is also a rhetorically sound decision. In many other segments of Sara's narrative, the dialogue is paraphrased. Here, by quoting her objections to Norman's driving, she is able to accomplish several tasks that might otherwise be impossible. She can criticize her husband's judgement ("what is *wrong* with you") and praise her own motives ("you *know* I'd agreed to do this because I knew Alicia needed, you know, help") indirectly. These statements are situated as "reporting"of events. As such, they are less obviously manipulative, and allow Sara to maintain the stance of objectivity and fairness.

This story also includes a telling narrative slip and recovery: "but I know *other* times . . Alicia has a pacemaker, she's young, she's only one month younger than me?," that prompts a challenge from Kimberly. The "other times" that Norman has traveled out of town with Alicia are not so easily explained away as necessary trips. In using the phrase "I know" and stressing "other" in this manner, Sara implies that she "knew" there was something unusual going on. This slip must be immediately countered if Sara's preferred self is to hold up under scrutiny. Sara breaks off from talk about the "other times" to suggest that Alicia is not the type of person that she should have suspected as the "other woman." Here Sara's wording is syntactically awkward but rhetorically sound. Generally when one talks about someone becoming ill at a young age, one does not both highlight and then downplay the ill person's age. Sara states both that Alicia is "young" for a person with a pacemaker but "only one month younger than me." In doing so, she magnifies the perception of Alicia's illness – it is unusually severe for a woman of her age – while at the same time downplaying her potential attractiveness as a younger woman.

Kimberly immediately breaks in when her mother's appraisal of Alicia takes on this positive note. Her interjections are particularly complicating in this passage, as they suggest that Sara failed to see what was common knowledge. If Alicia is commonly known to be a drug abusing "whore," then Sara might be considered inattentive or foolish in not suspecting Alicia's relationship with Norman regardless of her health. Sara discounts this version of Alicia as being too old to be relevant to her situation, as the Alicia that Norman took trips with is "conservative now."

She then continues to recast these "other" out of town trips as innocent by illustrating with an example of the trip Norman and Alicia took when Alicia's pacemaker was installed. By choosing this one trip to exemplify all other trips, Sara removes the sexual context. It is hard to imagine a person about to undergo a cardiac procedure as being sexually preoccupied. Perhaps more importantly, Sara mentions that Norman and Alicia stay with Alicia's father while they are out of town. By implication, staying with "family" makes the trip legitimate. Kimberly provides another reading of this sleeping arrangement by echoing her mother's statement but with different emphases: "they *stayed* with her *faamily*.." Kimberly actively mocks the idea that Norman and Alicia's trip was innocent because her family was present, and provides instead a sense that this setup was inappropriate and contrived. After this interruption, Sara no longer tries to claim that the trips out of town were innocent. Although she reasserts her fairness and generosity as reasons that she did not object to this trip ("so of *course* I felt, you know, go *help* her"), she acknowledges that perhaps there was "something more" involved.

Laurie's Account: the Fraud Victim

Laurie came to my home after dropping her small son off at preschool, and I made us coffee before setting up my interview equipment. I had met Laurie years ago through a mutual friend, and so was comfortable conducting the interview in my home. From what I had known about her young adulthood and first marriage, I knew that a number of extremely difficult topics might come up and assumed that this setting would be the most appropriate and comfortable.

As we sat and talked briefly before I began recording, I explained the purpose of my research and asked Laurie to pretend as much as possible that I was a complete stranger. This was, of course, an impossible request. At the same time, I wanted to hear the "whole story" of her separation in her words. She agreed and sat cross-legged in a chair for a moment, seemingly considering how to present the information to a "stranger." Throughout the course of this interview she would veer back and forth between personal familiarity and distance, alternately reporting events in a slower and more considered tone and actively dramatizing her stories with gestures, strong inflection, and vocal mimicry.

Laurie's account was jarring to hear, and sounded like a troubles tale of victimization, sexual excess, and poor judgement. Laurie was pregnant from rape at the time of her marriage. Both before and after her marriage, her former husband Steve was regularly unfaithful to her. At one point she and Steve decided to have an open marriage and invited another man, James, to live with them. Laurie has since married James, but not before dating an unsavory man she describes as "a basket case and fairly repugnant" in a "*blatant* example[s] of self-flagellation."

Unlike most participants, Laurie takes more than partial blame for her separation and subsequent divorce. She is nearly as harsh in appraising her own actions and motivations as she is in assessing those of her ex-spouse. In coding and analyzing this data, I wondered how to make sense of this portrayal of a very unflattering self. Narrators generally try to *maximize* their positive qualities and elicit a positive reaction from their audience (see Vaughan, 1986; Riessman, 1990). Yet the self that Laurie was seemingly constructing did not sound like any self that a narrator would wish to establish.

The key to understanding Laurie's account is the ongoing theme of falseness. As I will show, within her account Laurie continually insists that she was *never* "really married" to Steven. Laurie's extremely unflattering constructions of both Steven and herself are used to support this contention. Laurie's self within this context is not a foolish self nor even a self-destructive one, although both of these themes are threaded through her many narratives. Instead, Laurie constructs what I term a "fraud victim" self. Laurie had entered into an ill-advised marriage in the hopes of having certain emotional and psychological needs met and was bitterly disappointed. As she relates her separation account she verbally annuls this unfortunate union. In doing so, she first establishes that she entered into this marriage with excusable, if misguided, motives. Secondly, she portrays Steve's reasons for marriage and actions within the marriage as so outlandishly inappropriate that they nullify all aspects of the marital contract. Finally, she positions the public aspects of the marriage in a manner that divides them sharply from her everyday experience of married life. This final aspect of Laurie's self is critical to establishing her case. If she can split the marriage in question into opposing "marriages," one private and one public, and can establish the public version as false, then her definition of the marriage at hand becomes the "correct" version.

Both parties came into the marriage with less than ideal motives. In this passage, Laurie tells how their reasons for the marriage set the couple up for failure:

Erica: When did you stop doing marital things?

Laurie: I don't think we *did* any marital things.

Erica: During the whole course of your marriage?

> Laurie: He married *me* predominantly because he wanted to get more financial aid. Anyway. And . . I married *him* . . . because . . I had been raped, and was in a very . . *bad* emotional state. I married him basically because I figured if I was *married* to him, then somebody would have a vested interest in being there to protect me, and make sure that I wasn't ever hurt again. So . . . we really ought not to have ever gotten married.
>
> Erica: But did you ever behave in ways you would consider a married couple behaves?
>
> Laurie: No. No.

In this passage, it is clear that from Laurie's perspective the two spouses were looking to be married to someone, not necessarily to one another specifically. It is the status of marriage, rather than emotional and experiential closeness to a beloved other, that each was after. In this narrative, Steve married Laurie strictly as a business decision. As a married student he would automatically qualify as financially independent from his parents and would be eligible for more student aid. He could have married any woman and received this same benefit. Laurie's motive is also a general one. She was seeking "somebody" to have an interest in her well being, and thought that marriage would bring emotional investment rather than emotion motivating marriage. If this were the case, Laurie could have married any young man she chose to date with the same result.

Although both Laurie and Steve are shown here to have married for the "wrong" reasons, there is a difference in the type of motive each has. The attribution of fraud is not evenly distributed. Steve's motives are portrayed as entirely selfish; the union is based on his personal financial need, and there is no "we" specified here in his intent. By contrast, Laurie's motives are portrayed as being more closely in line with the traditional

expectations of marrying couples. They are emotionally based, and are designed to pair her with a protector if not a soulmate.

Laurie also decreases her exposure to sanctioning for improper motives by minimizing her accountability at the time that the marriage was conducted. The rape she describes in this passage happened less than a year before her marriage, and had resulted in pregnancy. She suggests that she was emotionally damaged by the experience, and afraid for her future physical safety. Laurie acknowledges that these circumstances are not proper motive for marriage, as they are part of the reason that "we really ought not to have ever gotten married." At the same time, Laurie's choice is presented as an honest if unwise reaction to trauma, and therefore not selfish or deceptive.

Laurie uses her emotional fragility as a recurring theme within her account. This has an unusual result. Although Laurie continually uses her emotional state to call her own judgement into question, her stated lack of stability has the opposite overall effect. Laurie's judgement and narrative trustworthiness become *less* suspect than they might be if she had been of sound mind when entering into and remaining in this relationship. As a result, Laurie is free to story both her ex-spouse and their marriage as negatively as she wishes. She has preempted the issue of poor judgement by providing an explanation that forms a sympathetic context for her account.

When Laurie and Steve were married, they had a catch as catch can ceremony that she describes as "*totally* half-assed." Here the sacred, unifying symbolism of the traditional wedding ceremony is invoked and then turned on its head, as Laurie uses the improvised timing and setting of her ceremony to underscore the false nature of the union:

> Well, okay, when we first got married, we got married on the front steps of the [large local building] by a friend of his. Which . . . it was, *totally* half-assed to begin with. Uummm, we never had, there, there wasn't any real *wedding*, it was just kind of a Well, okay let's get the paperwork so that he can get m-, you know, the financial *aid* that he needs, because . . he's having a money . . *crunch*. Or something. Um, and that's . . explains the timing of our marriage. Ah, less than a week after we got married, we got married like in early December, and he went . . home for Christmas *break*, and I stayed and I worked through Christmas break. Sooo, the quote, honeymoon, he spent up in, up in ah South Carolina and I spent working double shifts at my *job*. Which, at the time I was also pregnant, because the child from the . . rape was placed for adoption, it was during that time frame. So, I was of a very *fragile* emotional state, I suppose. Um. Explains why I married in the first place. But there were *little* things, from the very beginning that . . *really* pointed to the idea that we didn't consider each other *married*. (Okay) Like . . oh, the fact that I gave him a certain amount of money . . to buy wedding rings, because, well, he wasn't employed at the time, and I *was*, and . . I gave him like a hundred and fifty *dollars* for wedding rings and he decided that instead of spending it on wedding rings he would go and spend it on his quote ex-girlfriend unquote . . . because she was depressed he was getting married. Which, he never broke up with, he was with her the whole time anyways. So.

This passage draws heavily upon the cultural meanings embedded in the traditional wedding ceremony. Television and advertising along with tradition dictate that a "real" wedding requires an official, a church or other imposing setting, an exchange of wedding rings, and a honeymoon at the very least, although couples can put as much planning and detail into the ceremony as stamina and budget allow (see Ingraham, 1999). Laurie invokes the lack of these traditional markers as signs that the wedding and resultant marriage were not legitimate. The official is described only as one of Steve's "friends," which implies that he or she did not have the legal status as government official, notary, or clergy required to marry a couple. The rest of the wedding experience is also shown to be perfunctory; there is no church, no honeymoon, and no exchange of rings.

This narrative switches midstream from the story form used to detail the setting of the "half-assed"wedding to the episodic form. (see Riessman, 1990) The episodes Laurie chooses to share serve a dual purpose. Not only do they hold Laurie's "false" marriage up against the cultural ideal of a legitimate marriage as described above, they illustrate that Steve never chose to take on the role of spouse. Steve is to blame in each instance for Laurie's marital disillusionment. In each episode, Laurie evokes the culturally informed expectations she had regarding the experience of marriage, and how Steve fell short of these expectations based on selfishness. By illustrating the false nature of her marriage in this manner, Laurie builds a sense of Steve having broken the implied contract involved in marriage. First, Laurie tells how he left her alone at Christmastime shortly after their wedding, while she was pregnant and in "a very *fragile* emotional state." Laurie terms this period of time her "quote, honeymoon." It is important to note that Laurie does not speak of having "no honeymoon," but instead uses a rhetorical construction that implies the falsity of a "so-called honeymoon." The spoken word "quote" recurs again in this narrative when Laurie explains why she did not have a wedding ring. Steve was not working, and so could not buy her a wedding ring. Adding insult to injury, he took the money that Laurie gave him to purchase a set of rings and spent it on his "quote ex-girlfriend unquote," who he had continued to sleep with during much of their relationship. The conceit of speaking the word "quote" or the phrase "quote, unquote" occurs several times in Laurie's account, and works to convey her sense of falsity. Laurie punctuates each instance by using the first two fingers of each hand to make invisible quote marks. This unusual rhetorical device is packed with meaning. According to Anderson (1990 p.

147), the use of these "air quotes" indicates that whatever statement is wrapped by the quotes "you want it understood, you don't really mean."

Anderson's discussion of one possible construction of the postmodern self, that of "living between quotation marks," suggests that this reflexive self is aware of and highlights unreality. (p. 144) The self between quotes is a "camp" self in action, defined by doing something that is understood as "only semireal." (ibid.) Laurie's regular use of air quotes reinforces the construction of the sham marriage both rhetorically and theatrically. In this way, Laurie separates "being married" from "doing marriage." For Laurie, her experience of marriage is a public performance, and as such "unreal," in contrast to the genuine and emotionally based experience of "being married to somebody":

> Erica: So what things . . when I say, when did you stop doing marital things, what type of thing would you consider . . normal married couple stuff to do? That you missed out on?
>
> Laurie: Spending time and enjoying each other's company. Ummm . . I didn't, it's gonna sound *really* weird but I didn't, I didn't really *like* him. I, I told myself that I loved him but I never really even *liked* him, he was just kind of *there*. (Laughing) You know? It was, it was, it . . the idea of being married to somebody . . who seemed, he *was* intelligent, you know, and, and he *had*, he *was* interesting um, he had a lot of . . . odd *things* about him that made him intriguing but I never loved him. And spending time near somebody that you *love* is . . a married thing. And we, we went out and we . . we ate *dinner* together but it was never . . . it didn't *feel* like it was even really a *date* let alone a married moment. You know, I mean, we would go dancing, and I would . . end up . . on the other end of the club! From where he would be (laughing)! Umm, there, we would do things together but we weren't ever really *together*, it was never *any real* attempt at being to-ge-ther. We were just, more like roommates the entire time, it was . . not a very loving . . arrangement.
>
> Erica: So really it's an emotional thing, it's not that you didn't *do* stuff.
>
> Laurie: Yeah! Yeah. It, it's an emotional thing um, there's a certain amount of vulnerability or empathy that you would have towards a *spouse* . . and it

> was *never* there with him. He was just, a person that, that I cohabitated with, and I . . tolerated at *best* and despised at worst. You know?

By delineating "couple things" that she never experienced in her marriage, Laurie locates the nature of "being married" as outside of what couples do together. Interestingly, Laurie answers this question about what "things" she did *not* "do" by listing things that she and Steve *did together* but which should not count due to the lack of emotion between them. It is love that invests a marital contract with its "reality." Laurie and Steve in fact spent a fair amount of time together, eating out, going dancing, and spending time at home, but their legal status as spouses does not make these activities "married couple things." In contrast, these same activities would be a "married thing" if the private, emotional experience of "being married" were realized in the relationship. Laurie acknowledges that Steve never held the role of "spouse" in the relationship, in large part because her feelings towards him did not fit with what spouses "would have" towards one another.

Despite the host of problems in this relationship, Laurie and Steve stayed married for five years. They separated and reconciled a number of times, "off and on consistently" according to Laurie, with the final separation lasting two and a half years. How to count reconciliation and separation within the context of denying the existence of marriage becomes problematic in the telling, however. Since the marriage has been characterized as existing in appearance only, Laurie uses this same marker to delineate separation. Here the "real" separation is the final one where Steve and Laurie lived in separate cities:

Erica: How often did you see him while you were separated?

Laurie: When he . . had moved to –, when we had the *real* separation, um . . . I think a total of . . . maybe five times in the course of two and a half years?

Erica: I noticed you called that one the "real" separation. How come?

Laurie: *Wellll* . . . you can't be made, you can't really be *separated* and living in the same domicile, I mean, even if you're avoiding each other you're still . . *play*acting as far as soc, as socially, to people about being *okay* in the married state.

Erica: Okay, so you had to pretend to be married?

Laurie: Well, yeah I guess. Not *had* to, it just kind of *happened*, you know?

Erica: How did it happen?

Laurie: Um, people would, you know you're going to eventually get friends and stuff who are asking about the other to . . *one*, and ah . . instead of going into a long, sordid *story* about stuff, it's usually a lot easier to . . . say, you know, she's busy or doing whatever.

The emotionally estranging aspect of separation, which is often cited by my other participants as occurring prior to the "actual" breakup, is missing entirely from Laurie's account. Unlike many couples who move from closeness to hollow cohabitation and thus begin "uncoupling" long before either party moves out of the shared residence (Vaughan, 1986), Laurie cannot structure her separation experience in as neatly and temporally ordered a fashion. There was never any "real" love between the pair, nor any "true" marriage according to Laurie. So, the telling of a gradually unraveling union is not a storyline available to this speaker.

Instead, Laurie must locate separation only within the context of unmasking the publicly enacted farce that she and Steve continually produce. Laurie has rhetorically

separated the private and public "marriages" available to couples throughout the course of her account, and has claimed that she and Steve never shared a private, emotional, "real" marriage. The marriage hinged upon appearances alone, and required that the pair "playact" the appropriate spousal roles. As a result, the only "real" separation is the one where these acts failed to convince.

Other times throughout the course of their marriage, when they were living in the same house but not interacting in so much as a friendly manner, are not seen as periods of "real" separation. Even when the pair *physically delineated separate spaces* in their cohabitation, this circumstance was not considered enough of a change in the nature of their marriage to warrant the designation of a "real" separation. Laurie described one of these periods to me, and it was surprising how coldly acrimonious their living arrangements became. At one point the couple divvied up the home, each choosing a separate door to use when entering and exiting so they would not have to encounter one another more than absolutely necessary. Shared areas were kept to the barely required minimum; there was only one bath in the marital home, and so it had to be shared, as did the kitchen. Still, they lived together and thus were as "married" as they had ever been, since the loss of love is not relevant in this instance.

Laurie's sense of having been defrauded by marriage revolved around her expectations, both positive and negative. Clearly, her expectation of emotional fulfillment and protection were not met by her spouse, and prevented her from defining her life with Steve as a married one. This self-definition was so strongly a part of Laurie's account that

at the end of our talk she questioned whether she even had the right to narrate a story about marital separation:

> Erica: Okay. Can you think of anything that I forgot to ask you or anything that you think is important that we haven't covered?
>
> Laurie: Hmm. Not . . really. Um, again I don't know if I'm making a very good *topic* for this because of me not . . the, the way that I considered myself. In the marriage. Or, in the cohabitation arrangement (laughs).
>
> Erica: At *no point* did you consider yourself married?
>
> Laurie: No.
>
> Erica: Really, putting yourself back there, on the day you got married you said, well this is just all a big sham.
>
> Laurie: (whispering) Pretty much. It was never . . the, okay, there were some times when I thought, Oh this is kind of sweet, how, how nice this, this would be, to be married. I was, it was, enamored with the concept of being married. I was not at all . . . . acting real towards the situation, it was the *idea* of being married that appealed to me, it was not . . being married to this individual.

Throughout most of her account, Laurie has had the freedom to story herself as a "not-married" by virtue of her marital experience. The story was hers to tell as she chose. However, in questioning whether she was an appropriate narrator for the purposes of my research, she confronted the question of how she would be defined by an outsider. Objectively, she fit my final protocol: she had been legally married, and either was or had been separated from her spouse. When Laurie suggests that she's not "making a very good *topic*" for my study, she begins to state that it is because she was "not" something, implying a failure to meet my very open requirements. Instead she catches herself; she does "fit" with the study because she legally was "married," but she amends that she "considered herself" in a way that would not fit my requirements. She even goes so far to

revise her statement "in the marriage" to "in the cohabitation arrangement," further stressing that "marriage" was never a lived experience in her interpretation.

I challenged her reading of her circumstances, because I found her account to be so staunchly denying of the "reality" of marriage that I suspected the use of the language of negation to hide an aspect of the story that she wished to avoid. In confronting her with the hypothetical portrayal of her thoughts during her wedding, I short-circuited Laurie's ability to claim justifiable motive for going through with the ceremony.

Her response, which originally affirmed my re-storying of the wedding experience, was whispered; this was not a storyline that Laurie wanted to give voice to. She finds her footing during the next sentence, when she switches from the blanket statement "never," which would have forced her to characterize all of her experiences as uniform, to the phrase "there were some times" which provides the narrative latitude necessary to story atypical examples. She then followed up with a short characterization of these "times" that, in the space of one sentence, switched from the present to the subjunctive tense: "times when I thought, Oh this is kind of sweet, how, how nice this, this *would be, to be married*." (emphasis mine) This is a striking statement. Laurie wished "to be married" even while she *was* married to Steve. Even in providing examples of the times that contradict Laurie's "never" having considered herself married, she words her account in a way that supports this original contention.

> Erica: I think the confusion that I am having is because you were saying that while you were married you weren't really married.
>
> Laurie: Mm hm.

> Erica: I don't see why . . what was stopping you from doing what you wanted to do anyway?
>
> Laurie: The *concept* that if . . as a wife, one was supposed to be accommodating. The whole social stigma of, okay, these are the marital *rules*. I don't know where I got them, but they were, they were *there*. There was this set of assumptions that (in authoritative voice) as a married individual I am now responsible for x, y, and z.
>
> Erica: What are x, y, and z?
>
> Laurie: Oh, something along the lines of, now that I am *married* I am responsible for making sure that the kitchen and the bathroom are clean at *all times*. Ah, now that I am married I am responsible for making sure that there is a hot meal waiting for, for . . spouse. (Okay) Now that I am *married* I am responsible for making sure that the grocery shopping has been done. *He* will in turn take out the *garbage*, he will in turn do the work on the *car*, and the physical, male-originated . . *stuff*, and I will do the domestic *stuff*, and . . that's the way it will be. And . . (laughing) that was not the way it was. In fact it, really not that much, it . . the way it is any *more*, for most people. But, I had a whole set of assumptions that were systematically disproved. And I suppose he did too.

In this passage, Laurie acknowledges the porous boundary between public and private experiences of marriage. It is through this boundary that social expectations impinge upon private life. Generally, in a marital relationship "private" behaviors are understood as those that occur in the home. It is not my neighbor's business how my husband and I arrange who pays the bills, who makes the bed, or who performs any of the other seemingly endless mundane tasks of living.

There is an internal scrutiny that goes on, however, when lived reality butts up against cultural expectation. As Coontz (1997) has described, cultural expectations about the proper way to "do" family are tethered to an atypical and outdated model of family form and function. We no longer live in a society where the male-breadwinner/female-housewife model is preferred or, in many cases, even possible. Individual realities of

family life may not reflect this proper way that families are supposed to behave, but individuals experiencing family are still subject to social and cultural pressures to conform to this model.

Although Laurie does not explicitly story her experiences as a division between the real and the ideal in married life, she does touch upon the role requirements of "wife" that she experienced. It is interesting here to note that when Laurie begins her explanation of how she was constrained by marriage she does so in a general manner. "One" must do certain things in certain ways, since one is now married. This linguistic technique is a means for distancing Laurie from the role of "wife" in her account, as she has already dismissed occupying this role for "real." "As a wife, one" has to conform to unspoken marital rules and assumptions. Laurie is unable to maintain this sense of distance, however, as she then goes on to detail how the expectations of "wife" were part of her personal experience of marriage.

How to untangle the set of cultural expectations that go along with the role of wife is complicated for a wife who denies marriage. In this instance, Laurie denies that feeling "like a wife" has anything to do with "feeling married":

> Erica: Even though you didn't feel married, you still felt the marital assumptions.
>
> Laurie: Oh yeah! Oh yes!
>
> Erica: So, you had all of the pressures of feeling married . . .
>
> Laurie: Uh huh.
>
> Erica: So you felt . . in some ways, you *did* feel married.
>
> Laurie: Ahhh . . . (grimaces)

Erica: You felt like a wife . .

Laurie: I felt like . . . (sighs) . . . . . (sighs) . . I don't suppose you could feel really genuinely *married* to somebody when there's not a major emotional connection there. (Right) When you are sitting there with your spouse . . and you look over at your spouse, one should have *some* sort of an emotional response. Other than irritation. (Right) There just should be *something there*! You know?

Erica: So even though you didn't feel married *to him*, you were feeling married *in general*?

Laurie: Yes. I did try to playact the married, I did try to do the housewife thing. I did try, well, not housewife thing, but the . . . playhouse thing, I did, I did make a genuine attempt at that. There was that whole set of *assumptions* that, now that you are married, x, y, and z. You are gonna do the shopping and you are gonna do this, you are gonna do that, you are gonna do the *other*. I stopped . . talking to most of my *friends*. Because, well, he . . I married into a set of *new* friends. I made . . (sighs) . . . *cakes* for him to take *home* with him. Stupid stuff that I would not normally do. You know . . . just . . *things*.

Erica: Married people stuff.

Laurie: Married people stuff! And I did these things because . . . I suppose . . I figured it was *expected*. You know? I'm not sure who I figured was expecting them, that, the probable, you know, the, the like ah . . . (ominous voice) *cloud of social judgement* that didn't really *have* a face but hovered over my house. (Laughs) I don't know. I don't know.

Both Laurie's words and her gestures are important in this passage. Laurie searches for a way to accommodate *both* having denied the role of spouse yet having accepted in many ways the role of wife. The closer these two states become in our collective account, the more discomfort Laurie exhibits.

In the early segment of this narrative, Laurie is extremely enthusiastic. My comment about "marital assumptions" is met with exclamatory statements: "Oh yeah! Oh yes." At this point, my line of inquiry has not yet led away from the case she is trying to

establish. As I move further from the public aspects of marital behavior toward private experiences and feelings about marriage, Laurie becomes notably reticent. The phrase "pressures of feeling married" follows from having felt pressure related to "marital assumptions" that Laurie has already acknowledged. Still she is much less effusive in her answer ("uh huh") as I have bridged "pressure" with the previously denied "feeling married."

The turnaround is complete when I suggest that what she has already agreed upon, having experienced the "pressures of feeling married," can be construed as an aspect of feeling married. At this point Laurie makes a dismissive noise ("ahhh"), followed by a pause of several seconds, and then a facial grimace. Laurie does not comment aside from these gestures; within the context of my line of inquiry, there is very little she can say without invalidating some of her earlier points.

I did not want to force a story that was not part of Laurie's self-perception, however, so I backed up to the last accepted point and recast "feeling married" to having "felt like a wife." Laurie begins to take up this conversational thread when she states "I felt like," but then the thread is dropped when she pauses for eleven seconds. During this pause, which is the longest pause in her account, she sighs twice. This portrayal of discomfort with the topical thread is then followed up by a different narrative format, supporting the contention that her story does not easily accommodate the possibly contradictory statuses of "wife" and "not spouse." The new narrative format serves to distance Laurie from this sticking point. She and I are no longer talking about her experiences; the generic referents "you" and "one" are now used to tell why a wife is not

necessarily "really" married. The story is further distanced from Laurie's lived experience through the use of a hypothetical structure, in which an unspecified other "could" have difficulty feeling "really genuinely married."

My responding question echoes Laurie's desire to bring the discussion of feeling married away from her specific circumstances. In asking if she felt "married *in general*" but not to Steve, I make room for her to reinforce both of her earlier contentions. She had all of the pressures of "wife," with the attendant housework and guilty "should" feelings. At the same time, she did not feel married to a spouse. This dichotomy is a key element of the self that Laurie creates in her account. Part of Laurie's having been defrauded in her marriage is that she experiences all of the stresses, problems, and pressures of marriage, but reaps none of the emotional benefits that are supposed to balance out the hard times.

When Laurie talks about "playacting" the role of wife, she structures her talk in a way that suggests objection to an unstated criticism. The awkward phrasing "I *did try* to playact the married, I *did try* to do the housewife thing" (emphasis mine) implies that someone has suggested that she did *not* try to fill this role. This segment of narrative also lapses into the habitual narrative form, suggesting that the attempt to "playact" the role of wife was an ongoing process. Here again, Laurie speaks of what is "real" and what is "playacting," but in a structurally intriguing way. Laurie only speaks of having mad a "genuine attempt" while married within the context that this attempt was part of a known exercise in falseness: "the . . . playhouse thing, I did, I did make a genuine attempt at that."

In my next question, I termed the little tasks and accommodations Laurie made in her marriage as "married people stuff." Surprisingly, Laurie emphatically agreed with this assessment when earlier she had strongly objected to ever having done "married things" or engaged in "married couple" behaviors. Although the phrases seem similar, the fine distinctions contained in their wording are enough to make one set repugnant to Laurie and the other easily acceptable. Married "things" and "married couple" behaviors, in the context of our earlier talk, indicated a sense of being "married to" one's spouse. A married couple is comprised of two people who are married to each other, and couple "stuff" by extension is experienced by both partners as a communal experience. This is the private experience of marriage that Laurie never had. On the other hand, "married people" are not necessarily intertwined; several married people may have an experience, but each by themselves without involving their respective spouses. Laurie can experience "married people stuff" as the phrase only requires that the person be married, while married couple stuff requires that the married persons experience their state as being "coupled" and therefore cannot be supported by this account.

CHAPTER 5
AVAILABLE SELVES

> You know, like I already know I'm the best thing for him, and if he doesn't know that, then, sorry Charlie. (Carlotta, early 50s, separated from her second husband)

The construction of self during marital separation is a messy business. The meta-narrative of marital disruption -- that someone is 'to blame', that the marriage was somehow unhealthy, that ugly words and actions have occurred -- prevents some storylines from being readily available to narrators. Nor do narrators have recourse to easily understandable linguistic categories. 'Wife' and 'ex-wife' both have concrete meanings, but 'separated spouse' is open to (mis)interpretation.

Constructing the separated self, then, is like the working of a puzzle. Narrators have a general idea of 'how' they want to be perceived: positively if at all possible, sympathetically at the very least. (Vaughan, 1986; see also Weiss, 1975; Riessman, 1990) Keeping in mind this general goal, the separated person then tries various aspects of self out for 'fit.' The end product is a uniquely personal 'self' or 'selves' that take into account both biographical constraint and the context of interaction at hand.

This individualized 'self,' while thematically coherent within the larger narrative, is not a solid construct. Narrators apply different images of 'self' at different points in their talk, to meet the ongoing requirements of the conversation. The resulting 'self' is

multi-layered. It consists of differing aspects of identity that each serve to explain different nuances of the separation experience.

The multiplicity of selves that narrators use in describing their experiences may not obviously "match" with one another. This does not mean, however, that any one self is more or less true than the others. Choices that narrators make from among the stock of more general, biographically available selves are best understood as more or less useful in forming a successful, convincing account. Any seeming inconsistencies or falsities may call the factual truth into question, but this is not relevant to understanding the meaning of the story at hand; the narrative "truth" remains. (Bjerrum Nielsen, 1999)

In taking a more general look at the "selves" available to separated persons, I dismantle the overall structure of this layered self and highlight the component parts of the individual's constructed identity. Each individual person is drawing from a common discursive field, made available through social understandings of the meaning of marriage and the nature of marital difficulty. By extension, it should be possible to see where different participants use similar discursive strategies and cultural referents in their construction.

My goal here is not to show "what" people report doing or feeling during separation, or even why separated people do what they do. This has already been accomplished thoroughly by Vaughan (1986) and Weiss (1975). Many of the findings that these researchers reported were confirmed in my study. However, since their topical focus is not central to my work, I will mention these confirmed findings only where the action or emotion in question is relevant to a form of self in consideration. For my

purposes, what people report doing and experiencing takes a back seat to their rhetorical purposes for relaying this information in a given manner.

In analyzing the transcribed data from my interviews, I found a number of types of self that participants claimed through their choices of what stories to tell and how to tell them. Some types of self seem to fit together more readily to form a coherent, preferred identity. To show all of the various permutations of self possible through talk is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, as the overall meaning that a participant makes when claiming various separated "selves" is more than the sum of parts. The way different aspects of self are blended in separation accounts requires a close reading of lengthy passages of narrative from each participant as I have done in chapter four. This is cumbersome when done for a few individual cases. To attempt to analyze the usage of and interaction between various selves comparatively across accounts would be a mammoth undertaking, likely producing results simultaneously too detailed and too vast to report.

Rather than trying to detangle which selves are combined and under what circumstances, it is more relevant to this section of my work to note that *all* participants use more than one "self" in talk of marital separation. Not all claimed identities are given equal time on stage. But, there is no case, even those where a participant is adamant about the nature of their experience, where only one generally available self is used. Nor are any of the selves mutually exclusive, which is surprising considering the nature of the rhetorical selves that I found in the data. Participants lay claim to one or more of the

following at different points in their accounts: the never-married self, the still married self, the contingent spouse, the enduring spouse, and the compassionate ex.

The Never-Married Self

Two of my participants, Laurie and Nancy, made the striking statement that they were never genuinely married to their former spouses. By this they did not mean that their marriages were not legally valid – both were "married" in the legal sense of the word. The critical aspect of the never married self is the claim that somehow the marriage was never *experienced* as "real" and therefore does not count. This is a difficult case to make for a legally married person. If at any point, even in the very beginning, there was the experience of "feeling married," this identity will not hold. Never is unequivocal. To effectively claim this identity, then, narrator must establish that the marriage was motivated by practical rather than emotional reasons:

> Nancy: I feel, I've never really felt married to him, actually. I don't feel married, no.
>
> Erica: Okay. Um, when did you stop feeling married, or you just never did?
>
> Nancy: I don't think I really ever did.
>
> Erica: Really? (N: Yeah) Why do you think that is? It's interesting.
>
> Nancy: Um, I guess I'd better tell you why we married. (Okay.) Um, we married mostly for me, for me really it was security.

Nancy goes on in this narrative to describe the boyfriend she had been dating just prior to meeting her husband. This young man, whom she "was really in love with," broke off with her. Three months later she met her husband Phil, "kind of like a rebound." She

became pregnant and Phil pushed for marriage. Even at that point, Nancy realized "it just wouldn't, wouldn't work" and had an abortion. She agreed to marry him anyway, for "stuff":

> And um, but we still got married, anyway, even after the abortion. Um, basically because he, he worked at [local community college] and I could get in for free. (Okay) And so, and I needed health insurance and he, he was a [position at college] there, so he had all that stuff.

Like Nancy, Laurie also denies marrying her husband Steve for love. Practical considerations detailed in chapter four drove this marriage also. Laurie considers her marriage to be a mutual slip in judgement rather than a meaningful bond:

> . . . if you have two people that weren't really together, in the first place, the way I would consider myself with Steve, having not been, not really *been* together, it was sort of like roommates that did something *stupid* one day, um . . . It, it really wasn't a marriage. (Okay) It never really *was*. Um, neither of us regarded it really ever as a marriage at all, otherwise I don't think we would ever have approached things the way we did.

Not all people get married for the culturally approved "right" reasons, but a wedding with an ulterior motive does not guarantee the experience of a never-married self. Never-marrieds insist that the emotional closeness that is expected in a "real" marriage eluded them not only during courtship but throughout the whole of the relationship:

> It's, it's an emotional thing um, there's a certain amount of vulnerability or empathy that you would have towards a *spouse* . . and it was *never* there with him. He was just, a person that, that I cohabitated with, and I . . tolerated at *best* and despised at worst. You know?

> I guess, um . . . I guess I, actually, really, I don't think I really was in love with him. (Okay) I guess. So maybe really being in love with someone would feel like you were married.

This type of statement is only made by participants who claim a never-married self. In all other participants' accounts, even in those that told of continual fighting, infidelity, and ugliness, emotionally fulfilment, love, and closeness was also mentioned as being present at least some of the time.

The lack of emotional interaction described by participants claiming the never-married status extends to two areas fraught with emotion for most couples: sex, and fighting. For both Laurie and Nancy, married sexual behavior mentioned in their accounts does not imply intimacy. Rather, stories of sexual contact serve to illustrate the distance between spouses more clearly. Either the never-married spouse is made into an object of desire rather than love, or the sexual behavior itself is pathologized:

> I accepted his terms of an *open marriage*, and I decided to have *fun* with it. And, we . . he, he's bisexual and so am I, and there was this young man that *he* was very interested in that . . needed . . a place . . to live, anyway, there was this young nineteen year old man that he was interested in, that needed a place to live because his home life was . . in a very bad situation, and ah, we offered to let him be our roommate, and he and *I* got involved. And well, um . . I was sleeping in the middle. That was a nice reconciliation, or . . that was the grounds under which we quote reconciled unquote.

Here, Laurie's husband literally encourages a human wedge between the couple in bed. His choice of bed partners is not portrayed as innocent either; in this narrative, there is a strong sense that Steve is predatory. The man in question is a *young* man; Laurie emphasizes his age by repeating the word twice. This man is also in the fragile position of needing a place to live because of trouble at home. Their offer of a place to stay was made, Laurie implies, because Steve had sexual designs on him.

Nancy also stories her husband's sexuality as distancing. He has the "problem" of being overly preoccupied with sex, and is defined as "hardcore:"

> Erica: Define hardcore, if you are not too uncomfortable with that.
>
> Nancy: No, um hardcore is – hey, I danced [in a strip club], I'm not gonna be uncomfortable. I danced, it's not unusual. He um, he would want to do it um, like doggie style, and hitting, and pulling your hair.
>
> Erica: Okay, so rough and tumble. Yeah, okay.
>
> Nancy: He likes dirty movies, he, he, a lot of times had a Watchman, and he would get into it, he, he didn't know how to be soft and gentle.
>
> Erica: Okay. And it felt like it really wasn't about you?
>
> Nancy: yeah, I didn't feel like it was, I didn't feel like it was, um, me and, and it's not like we were together, it's more like I was just there as a thing to satisfy that urge he had, and that was all it was, basically.

Nancy's narrative includes the only sexually explicit passage about positions of intercourse that I was told. Other participants hinted around sexual intimacy, or told somewhat detailed stories of infidelity, teasing, and the like, but the detail stopped at the bedroom door. I was told who did things with whom, but not generally what these things were. All of Nancy's detail in this narrative describes distance, not intimacy one. Her husband objectifies her, is physically aggressive during sex, and positions her so that they are not face to face.

Both Nancy and Laurie tell of being unable to engage their husbands emotionally during conflict. This is unusual, as even couples who do not love one another may love to *fight* with one another. In both cases, Nancy and Laurie become exceedingly angry at times, while their husbands avoid or shut down conflict. Nancy acknowledges that her

husband "had a temper," but insists that he "never got angry" with her and would not participate when she started an argument:

> Erica: So was it possible for you to have any kind of conflict with him doing this?
>
> Nancy: No. I mean, he would never, he just, like that night, after I found out he lied to me, and I totally freaked out. I was yelling, screaming. He said, "you're really overreacting." That's how he always is, "You're just really overreacting and think you need to calm down." That's how it always is with me. He never got mad.

Here Nancy manages to convey that her husband was both unemotional and dismissive. She became angry because he "lied" to her, and was extremely distraught. Rather than address the issue at hand, Phil chose to minimize his wife's concerns with his response. That he "never" got mad implies that this disengagement was common practice for Phil.

Laurie's husband Steve was also characterized as passive and avoiding. Laurie described her husband in ironic terms, indicating that his refusal to face conflict was a problem in their marriage:

> . . . . Ahhhh . . . before . . . Steve never really *fought*, he never . . we never reallly argued. He, he . . avoided. Like, pathologically so, or he, he, he would go out of his way to be . . . quote, accommodating, unquote. And, and then he would just go off and do what he wanted to do. Again, very passive-aggressive. And um, so we never really *fought* so . . it started getting really quote, angry and chaotic, unquote, after . . he . . had *left*.

The never-married self implies the breach of a contract. These participants get married for practical reasons, not love. In each case, these participants detail how even their practical needs were neglected by their spouses. Nancy, who married a man who she

did not love but who had a good job for "security," ended up in more tenuous circumstances than she had been in prior to the relationship:

> Okay, um . . before I met him, I had my own house. I owned it. It was a condo, actually, like a townhouse. And um, I was very, um, very independent, you know, living on my own and, um . . . . And um . . . then after we got married, I felt like I lost my independence. I mean, I lost my house, I lost, we sold it, cause he didn't want to live under my roof, basically, was what I think it came down to.

Nancy and Phil did not purchase another home, because he was living for free at an apartment complex as part of his wages for half-time work. Instead, they took the money from the sale of her condo and purchased a truck for Phil. After the separation, Nancy took Phil's older Mustang, which she had to pay off, while Phil kept the truck:

> And um, that was really tough because, when we sold my house, I made ten thousand dollars off of it. We put that into a brand new truck which he got. So, I do feel like I was gypped off. That's what made me so mad, that he was bringing in so much more money and he got the truck, he got, he's living in the apartment, he got everything. And I, basically I took my bedroom stuff and left.

Laurie also tells about having her practical goals dashed, when Steve "throws away" his college degree program to move to another town and start a business with friends:

> Well, ah . . he went down for spring break to visit with friends . . and decided that he . . was going to quit *college*, um . . in his senior year, and ah, he was getting a chemical engineering degree, and just decided that, well, he'd throw his college education and everything that I thought would be *valuable* . . away to go and live in, with this commune.

Like Nancy, Laurie had married for security. Unlike Nancy, Laurie primarily wanted emotional security and a sense of physical safety. She describes having been raped, and is very emotionally fragile. Steve's actions throughout the marriage undermined these goals. Prior to leaving to join "this commune," where "there were multiple people living in the

house, with no . . delineation on who was with whom, or in what bedroom the would be spending the evening," Steve had an ongoing affair with one ex-girlfriend and a short-lived one with a sixteen-year-old. Laurie not only suffered humiliation over her husband's affairs – ". . I felt like an *idiot* the entire marriage" – but she contracted human papilloma virus, or HPV, a virus that can cause cervical cancer in some women.

The Still Married Self

In contrast to the never-married self, participants who use the still married self indicate that they consider themselves married regardless of their partner's views. This is enacted in two ways. A participant may draw from the traditional "death do us part" expectation, and declare him- or herself married for life, or may characterize separation as still being married until a final divorce decree is handed down. These narrators tell stories that support their contention of married status, and minimize questions of poor marital quality.

It is interesting to note that participants combine this self with other characterizations that imply that they understand and agree with the assessment that they are no longer "objectively" married. The still married self can be applied to *aspects* of the marital experience. For instance, Frances describes herself as a woman who has "never really felt divorced," and yet indicates that she felt divorced in an instant:

> Frances: Um, I, from the moment the word, that, that he said he wanted a divorce, I felt divorced. And yet, I never have really felt divorced.
>
> Erica: Okay, how does that work?
>
> Frances: Uh, I don't know how it works. But I realized just recently that there are people I work with who still think I'm married.

Frances goes on to tell how she has not had a serious relationship since her marriage broke up more than twenty years ago. In this manner, she is not yet divorced; she has never felt the desire or emotional readiness to date:

> Frances: I just know how I felt. And I don't even know that I would um, censure someone else for dating, while they were separated. I can't understand dating. I can understand getting reacquainted with people, and, and putting some feelers out. I don't think I can understand having sexual relations.
>
> Erica: Okay, because of that bond?
>
> Frances: Absolutely. Things are a lot different now, but for me it was just easier. Life was easier when you just behaved yourself.

Sexual behavior and morality are major themes within the structure of the still married self. For these participants, having sex "outside" of the marriage in question is wrong. This is not necessarily a general moral rule that they follow, but one that is relevant to their separation with the spouse in question. One participant, Carlotta, separated for five months before her second marriage ended in divorce. She still says that she "still feels married" to her former husband Eric, and did not date during their separation. Ironically, she met Eric while married to her first husband, John:

> And I was married at the time but was planning for years to leave my husband when the twins graduated. I just didn't see that I could make it with three kids on my own. So I had the intention and . . for years of leaving the kids' father. But then when I realized that I was falling in love with Eric, then I told my husband I wanted a separation.

For Carlotta, it is not the status of marriage that precludes sex outside of the relationship. The emotional investment in the relationship makes sex a betrayal. Where there is no love left, no betrayal exists. This same theme runs through other areas of her account, as she tells about Eric's several bouts of infidelity:

> Erica: So what changed your mind [about the relationship being doomed]? If divorce didn't do it, what's happened recently that makes you say, oh–
>
> Carlotta: The fact that after he broke up with that woman, and I actually forgave him, um, for the affair thinking it was sort of like a virus, maybe he couldn't even control it or, you know, there were so many factors that –
>
> Erica: Yeah, or was it a one-time shot?
>
> Carlotta: Yah, even though he did incredibly asinine things . . .

Carlotta continued to feel married and remain "faithful" for a number of months even after her divorce was final. She only began dating after deciding that the relationship was damaged irreparably. Here, Eric's infidelity is portrayed as a sickness that he cannot help. At that point, Carlotta forgave Eric. By characterizing his infidelity as not intentional, it is positioned as "not betrayal" and therefore excusable. Later in the narrative Carlotta tells about how Eric has continually dated women in their twenties and thirties, most notably women who have small children. This she cannot abide, because it is not a "virus" or beyond his control, and demeans both her and the relationship:

> And I've talked to a counselor about, you know, why would he be interested in running off with this twenty-two-year-old kid rather than going back with me. My analogy to him was, it's if you were offered two lottery tickets, one was known to be a winning lottery ticket, and one was iffy, why would you take the iffy? And that's exactly what he's doing. Because we know that we could have a good relationship.

Brian, who separated for the second and final time less than a year after he was married to Linda, is less forgiving of infidelity. Brian was raised Catholic but became Mormon so he could marry Linda. He was a virgin until their marriage, a fact that he stresses in his account, generally in contrast to his wife's sexual excesses:

> So we had to wait another year, and resist temptation, and uh, physically that is, and um, which was fine with me because that's how I was brought

> up, um, you know, you were not supposed to engage in uh, intercourse until after you were married, and that's what I did. Unlike her, uh, but I didn't hold that against her, you know, people make mistakes and that's it. Um, but I felt married, very much so. And that, that's why it hurt me even more so, was that just because we separated that this, to me in my mind, that doesn't make us less married. Makes us less together, but you're still married. Um, so, you know, I don't care if you, hey, you want, you don't want to settle down, and you want to have sex with every um, Tom, Joe and whoever. But wait, it, our divorce, uh, took four days. . . . it's not a long wait.

To Brian, separation is a matter of being physically separated. It in no way suspends the moral aspects of the marriage contract. His wife slept with two men at once during their separation, and this to Brian is inexcusable. Had she waited until after the divorce, he would have had "closure" and she could "feel free to fuck whoever you want to fuck."

The still married self also involves appealing to tradition. The notion of marriage as a lifelong commitment is challenged by what sociologists have termed "divorce culture" (Hackstaff, 1998). Divorce culture suggests that marriage is an optional and "contingent" state that can easily be escaped (ibid. p. 460). Still marrieds must play against this common perception through narrative, as their seemingly stubborn refusal to accept the end of a marriage does not fit with the new ideologies about marriage. By drawing upon traditional images, participants subtly invoke the old fashioned image of "for better or worse." For example, despite Brian's expressed anger at Linda's infidelity, he mentions "cherishing" his wedding ring throughout their separation:

> Um, when I was separated, um, I still wore my wedding band, um, I cherished it actually, and I . . . . every time, everyone would ask me, "Oh, how's your wife?" And I would be, "Oh, just great, she's fine, she's at home." Mind you, I had no idea where she was.

Frances also calls upon tradition when she tries to explain why she would not conform to her husband's changing expectations. Here Frances uses arguably the most divorce-unfriendly decade in American history to explain why she held the expectation that marriage would be "forever":

> Um, I was raised in the fifties, when everything, you know, was wonderful and average and normal, and nothing ever happened. And I just assumed that nothing would ever happen to, to my life.

Perhaps the strongest traditional referent that narrators use in constructing the still married self is religion. By commenting upon their marriages from a religious context, participants may be attempting to de-emphasize the legal dissolution of marriage. To be married in a religious ceremony is, for some religions, until "death do us part" regardless of what the local courts have to say.

Participants who invoke religion seem to expect that the cultural authority of religion to keep marriages together will help them maintain their status. Here, Frances expresses disappointment that her priest could not do anything to stop Victor from leaving:

> Um, no, he told me at home one night that he wanted a divorce, and we went to the church and talked to the priest, the Episcopal priest, one time. And um, I'm sure he ahs a standard set of questions he asks people, and he said, "Well, would you be willing to be in counseling?" or something, and I said, "OF course, anything." And ah, D just didn't want to do it. (Okay) and my priest said, "There really is just no way, I mean I don't know a way to make an adult person do something they don't want to, to do." So.

As Frances' priest pointed out, divine authority may help support the notion that one *should* stay married, but it has little bearing on the actual chances of marriages working

out. Carlotta goes one further, when she expresses surprise that her husband did not return, since she had reassurance from "where one would think it counted:"

> So um, I really believed that, that we would get back together again. I mentioned that God told me we would. (Okay) I had a couple of conversations with God and one he actually said, "He will be back." ....And so I of course read that to mean he will be back and we'll have our relationship back together again . . .

Narrators who construct a still married self during separation also take practical steps to guard this construction. One tactic used is to carefully choose how to portray the nature of the breakup and the actions of one's spouse. Describing the relationship in strongly negative terms or to encouraging others to see the spouse as a horrible person may lead to questions about *why* someone would still wish to consider themselves married to this spouse (see Riessman, 1990). Narrators who construct the still married self tread lightly here, keeping attribution of fault at a minimum and locating it *outside of* the context of the relationship. For instance, Carlotta's description of the "underlying problem" in the relationship does *not* mention any of the many problems that she had earlier told me about. Eric's infidelity, her inability to bear children, their emotional estrangement are all replaced by "stuff . . . from his childhood" and first marriage :

> I think the underlying problem is Eric a lot of stuff from his own life that he never cleaned up. (Okay) From his childhood. (Okay) That's a whole other chapter of the book. (Like issues) Issues, like yeah, he lived in foster homes, he was adopted when he was almost seven, all kinds of that kind of stuff (right) and his first marriage, when they split up and then they told him that the kid wasn't his.. (oh) and so he believed that for years and then found out this kid was his, and she wanted back child support for twelve years worth and we wound up going through courts in Georgia and (Now that you have money, give me a big lump sum and, yeah) Yeah, right.

In contrast, Frances is willing to place responsibility for the separation with Victor. She is careful, however, to include an explanation of how Victor's needs cannot be met because of her own childhood background:

> Frances: And he wanted met to be an independent person. (Uh-huh) More independent than I wanted to be. (Okay) Um..he..for whatever reason, you know, financially, or emotionally, or, he was not ready for the responsibility of marriage (Okay) and uh, I think the reason I take the view of marriage that I do is that my Dad was away for three solid years during World War two and my mother learned how to run the family. (Okay) Uh, handle the money, be the man of the, you know, wear the pants (Right) and I had always vowed that I would not do that. (Right) That my husband would be the man of the family, and my poor husband didn't really want to be the man of the family.
>
> Erica: He wanted to share the pants.
>
> Frances: At least, at least share them. (Laughs)

Frances tells of a husband who is not yet responsible enough to maintain a marriage. She then immediately follows this statement with a description of how her own mother shouldered the burden of all family care while her father was away. In reaction to watching her mother struggle to manage the family affairs, Frances decided that her "man of the family" would be a husband who does *all* of the wage earning. From this standpoint, it is not that her husband does not want to be a husband, but that he does not want to be the specific type of husband who "wears the pants." Frances also draws upon her family history in describing both her husband and her marriage in positive terms in a different part of her account:

> Yes. Um, everyone has troubles. (Mm-hm) And I could understand going through a bad patch, because my mom and dad did. (Mm-hm) You know, and when menopause hit her like a bomb and she was a beast for several months. And I remember it well. But my blessed Dad just hung in there. Um..we had a very good marriage of two people with common interests

> who treated each other as equals, you know, there was no verbal put downs, (Mm-hm) there was no physical abuse, there, he was creative, he was a good father, he was a good church person and then one day he decided he didn't want to play anymore. (Laughs)

It is important for narrators who are going to claim a never-married identity to establish the worth of the relationship that they are protecting. Carlotta also describes a marital relationship that for a long time was beneficial:

> It was just, he was, through the most part of the relationship he was very attentive, he'd send flowers (Mm-hm) and just call for no reason at all. I would write him poems and put them in his lunch (oh), I was happy to do lunch every day, I was giving him a little Hershey's Kiss all the time. All this kind of cutesy stuff continued through our relationship, up until close to the end.

Narrators who attempt to claim a still married identity face a sticky complication. If marriage is so important, why did these spouses not see problems on the horizon and work harder to stop the separation process? In several cases, these narrators tell of misunderstanding the nature of the marital separation. Some claim that they expected that the separation would be temporary either because they were misled or because they misinterpreted their partner's goals:

> And um... so anyway we were sitting out on the deck one day smoking, and he said, "Ah, we need to talk, I, don't take this the wrong way, there's no other woman involved or anything like that, but I feel like I need time to myself. So I want to move out for thirty days." And through this conversation I could tell that it was something that had been going through his mind for a while (Mm-hm) and had plans of where he was going to move (Mm-hm) and all this kind of stuff. And, and I think he really believed that this was just a thirty day, you know, something that he could get out of his system. He did say to me, "Just let me get this out of my system," or "When I come back through that door I'll never do this to us again." (Carlotta, separated from Eric)

> Um, you know, and here I have my, I called it my little shrine of R, hoping that this will blow over, um, although for a good two weeks, I was very

> angry. Um, and I had no idea if she was filing, or if she wasn't filing, for a divorce, and sure enough one day, I got the papers, and it crushed me. It absolutely, I was just yeah, I was putting on this face, to the guard, like, "Hey, how ya doing?" La la la. (Mm-hm) But inside I was like, "I cannot believe she's actually getting a divorce." Mind you, I'm the one that's fed up with her, and I could not believe she was doing it to me. (Brian, divorced from Linda)

Narrators also suggest that their spouses were prompted to leave because of problems that would have been transitory or overcome-able:

> Frances: But I feel very strongly that if we had hung together for, I want to say five years, but maybe even a year, that that (That would have passed?) and we would have come out the other end of the tunnel.
>
> Erica: What makes you say that?
>
> Frances: I think it was midlife crisis.

Carlotta draws upon this same cultural construct of "midlife crisis," with its attendant images of middle-aged men losing all sense and leaving their wives in a foolish attempt to recapture lost youth. The rhetorical use of "midlife crisis" is an escape from blame for both spouses. Wives whose husbands suffer from midlife crisis did not do anything to "cause" the crisis, and men who go through the crisis are suffering from a form of temporary insanity.

For the most part, this seems to be a device that is only available to women. Brian uses a similar narrative, that his wife is not "well," and in doing so he calls into question her judgement. While this is rhetorically sound for Brian's purposes in one aspect, it is harmful in others. Brian successfully suggests that his wife's decision to leave may not have been well thought out or rational. At the same time, however, he draws upon an image of mental illness that is unflattering to his spouse. Brian is claiming a still married

separated self. Although he is extremely angry at Linda for her infidelity and hypocrisy, he loves her still and did not want the relationship to end. Brian's portrayal of Linda is softened by mentioning a list of positive qualities along with her mental instability:

> Erica: So at that point her separation was public, but yours was private, almost.
>
> Brian: Exactly. Exactly. Right.
>
> Erica: Was that hard for you?
>
> Brian: It was, um, because she made up a few things and everyone just looked at me, and they knew me and they just couldn't believe some of the things she was saying and (Mm-hm) so they, they were more lenient, if we had to pick sides towards mine, um (Mm-hm) because it turns out that she also has um, like a, schizophrenia in her family that it was unaware of so, (Mm-hm) Um.
>
> Erica: Schizophrenia in her family? Or?
>
> Brian: Yeah, it's in her um, basically her entire family has been um, put inside a mental institution. Um, and she's very pretty, very slender, blond hair, blue eyes, and you would have never thought. But I didn't, it didn't, she never showed any signs uh, that she would flip out and stuff like that. She, she would throw things at me and stuff like that, so.

Linda's mental illness is less excusable than a "midlife crisis," as it is implied here that she is unstable by nature and the "crisis" would not be transitory. At the same time, it is not Linda's fault that she is unstable because she has "schizophrenia in her family." If Linda "flips out" and "throw[s] things" at Brian it is not because the relationship is bad, or because Linda is cruel. She has inherited a host of beautiful attributes, and one unfortunate one.

In one case, the construction of the still married self was most unusual. Yvonne describes her feelings of still being married in an almost mirror account of Laurie's "never

married" account. Like Laurie, Yvonne gets married for practical reasons, and experiences the oppressive weight of the legal designation of spouse:

> There were times during this whole *thing* that I felt married, I didn't *want* to feel married, I was an independent person, prior to diabetes, threw me into dependency. And um, I felt *shackled* by marriage. [I: Mm hm] We actually, we got *married* because of that. In a funny way because we, we were living together until 1990 when I um . . got sick. Just before we moved *here* we got married because he wanted to get insurance coverage and we didn't want the family, you know, we just thought it would be simpler to move here as a married [unclear]. Um. We considered ourselves married . . as a bond, without having a piece of paper, that old '60s saying? [I: Right, right.] But um . . . . once the paper was signed, I remember I felt shackled, I was, Oh my god. I'm actually *married* again. And his family started addressing, my family too, as Mr. and Mrs., and I was *lost*. I was, Mr. and Mrs. . . whatever.

Yvonne describes feeling married in the same negative way that Laurie does: feeling "married" in general is an oppressive, draining experience that consumes a woman in cultural expectations. Yvonne mentions that she was "lost" by becoming other than her "real" self, instead being "Mrs. Whatever." Unlike Laurie, however, Yvonne genuinely loved her husband. She describes being heartbroken when he became attracted to another woman, and generally speaks well of Gerald. Where Laurie was willing to be legally married but felt unmarried due to the lack of emotional fulfillment that would have made the marriage "real," Yvonne sees the marriage as a mistake that caused distance in the relationship:

> Erica: Okay, so you would say that you have that same kind of relationship with your ex?
>
> Yvonne: Better.
>
> Erica: Better? Wow.

> Yvonne: Better. Because we ha-, we were playing roles. And ah, the role playing is what . . screwed us up. So, we got through the role playing and sorted out all the crap, and . . um, went back to the real *people* but an updated version, you know, (tape unclear) but better.

Both Laurie and Yvonne use the example of "roles" being played, but to different effect. For Laurie, the role was all that there was to the relationship. For Yvonne, the role got in the way of the experience of closeness. Yvonne experienced her divorce as fixing a mistake, a phenomenon previously noted by Weiss (1975). Since the relationship itself was not the "mistake," once the legally sanctioned relationship was severed Yvonne began to rebuild a friendship with Gerald.

The Contingent Spouse

For a few estranged spouses, the married state is contingent upon potential events. Contingent spouses are currently apart from their spouse, either through separation or divorce, but leave an open doorway through which they can reunite if circumstances permit. This is an extremely difficult separated self to construct, as the telling process involved in going public with a separation tends to solidify identity as "single" and preclude reunion. (Vaughan, 1986) In constructing the separated self as contingent spouse, then, several aspects of the separation experience are storied: separation (including spousal interaction) is a private matter, there are specific circumstances under which reunion would be acceptable, and physical proximity is not the same thing as closeness.

Contingent spouses need to keep disclosure of their separation closely controlled because others who know about their circumstances may attempt to meddle:

> Erica: Okay, you sound very adamant about that. Were there reasons specifically why you were trying to keep it private?
>
> Yvonne: (smiles) *Yeeeaaaah*! You ask me, that's why I'm smiling. I'm not really sure. I know that we always kept our . . . . . private lives . . separate from our families, as much as possible, because our families tended to . . um, take something and elaborate the way they wanted t-, t-, to make something into their picture of it. [I: okay] So, when, when we went through something we would go through and complete it and know the end result, and then we'd tell everybody. 'Cause we didn't want their energy . . to um . .
>
> Erica: Could they . . have affected the end result?
>
> Yvonne: Ah . . no, they would have just irritated us, as we . . *made* our own process. They would have gotten their little fingers in the process to try and fix it, so.

In this passage, Yvonne describes her family's interference as more annoying than damaging. Just the same, she and Gerald chose to wait before notifying most family and friends, because of the potential effort in dealing with everyone's opinions and input.

Drew is also careful to keep others' opinions from sullying his separation. He and his wife Janice have not yet decided whether they will reunite. Janice is the one who left the relationship, and it is up to her to decide whether or not the relationship will continue. For his part, Drew is doing all he can to keep his options open. In relaying how he notified friends and family, he stresses his family's appraisal of his judgement:

> Uh, all my family basically said that you know, we hope things work out for both of you (Mm-hm) but kind of left it open-ended as exactly what that is. Um..I don't really talk to them about what's going on, because they respect my judgment enough that you know, they know I'll make whatever choice is right for me. (Right) Uh, everyone else just, they just kind of let me do my own thing, and...if I did need a shoulder to cry on, I know I could, but it's not something I really talk about very much.

Drew is clearly positioning himself as a man who has sound judgement, and who will find the "right" way even when no clear path presents itself. His reporting to his family was more detailed and immediate than that to his friends; he "doesn't talk" about separation with most people and as a result they "let me do my own thing." Drew is able to avoid the appearance of weakness and uncertainty – he is not vacillating, but appraising his options before doing the "right" thing, and he does not cry on shoulders about his circumstances.

Drew provides a similarly rational, structured set of circumstances that would support reuniting with Janice, despite the chaos of his situation. Janice had asked for reunion and then changed her mind twice during the course of the separation, and Drew has given her an ultimatum. She is to decide by a certain date, the day before his birthday, if she is coming back for good or not. Even if she decides to return, Drew may not take her back:

> Mm...I think it would have to be that she would have to change what she's wanting. (Mm-hm) I kind of wonder how much of this is just wishful thinking. (On her part or yours) On her part. As to what she wants, and doesn't really have a good basis in reality as to what..would be right. Then again, she's changed her mind so many times about so many different things..I don't know. (Okay) I, that's why I'm kind of keeping it open as to whether I want to or not. (Right) The one thing I told her a while back though, that uh, if we did get back together, we'd have to go to counseling. (Okay) And we went to two counseling sessions, and she said, "I don't want to go anymore." This was right after the separation. And I told her that you know, "If you do want to get back together on the twenty-seventh, we will have to go to counseling."

Within the context of our earlier conversation, "change what she's wanting" is not a vague reference. Janice is an amateur actress, and has described wanting a partner who will take care of all of the menial tasks of living so that she can dedicate herself to her art and succeed professionally. Drew is unwilling to make this concession, since it seems one-

sided. He specifies here that Janice would have to go to counseling, ostensibly to help her have "a good basis in reality as to what . . would be right" within the relationship.

Carlotta also acknowledges that despite Eric's infidelities and foibles she would be willing to consider reunion if circumstances were right:

> We've since agreed on honesty and no jabs, you know, no under the, you know, (Okay) no below the belt kind of stuff. Although he claims I still do that, and I probably do. Um, and, and he's lying to him, so he's not honest with me anyway (Right) so, so the rules aren't working. (The rules wouldn't be, yeah) Um, it would depend on what result you wanted, for what the rules would be. (Okay) I mean, if we wanted to reconcile, (Yeah) then obviously the rules would have to be honesty, um, the rules would have to be abstinence from others, (Yeah) we would have to.. set up time to spend, you know, go out, say twice a week, um, (Right) counseling..(Right) things like that.

In this section of talk, Carlotta shows that the relationship is not currently in a state where she would reunite with Eric. She "jabs . . below the belt" still, and he is "not honest." However, she still loves Eric and earlier in her talk stated that she would be willing to reestablish a relationship under controlled circumstances. Like Drew, Carlotta is constructing a rational, strong self. She is not willing to take Eric back unless he changes his behavior, nor is she willing to go from "fully separated" to immediately back into a full-time relationship. The two would need to spend time together to ease back into the union, "say twice a week."

Regular contact with the estranged spouse seems to be an important characteristic of the contingent spouse self. During many interviews, participants who expressed willingness to get back with their estranged spouse described to me how they were maintaining or even improving the relationship. According to Carlotta, she and Eric remained in contact by phone during their separation ("And I talk to him very, sometimes,

at least three times a week I talk to him. We e-mail back and forth.") and she had helped him with practical tasks like relocating from a girlfriend's apartment. The pair do not rehash relationship issues in their conversations, however, as this seems to be an emotionally dangerous area:

> But we do a lot of water cooler conversation kind of stuff. You know, like how's your week, how you doing, how'd you enjoy the Bucs game kind of stuff. Um, I try not to talk to him about my personal life, and I told him I don't want to know about his . . .

There seems to be a balancing act going on in the narratives of contingent spouses. On one hand, they express wanting to maintain in contact with their spouse. In this way, closeness can be maintained even though intimate and proximate contact that they shared when they lived together is gone. On the other hand, "friendship" is highlighted even to the point of excluding more serious involvement. Like Carlotta, Drew talks to his spouse regularly but as "friends":

> Mm....mm. Well typically we would phone just talk about each other's days, and talk about, just kind of talk about life. We don't, we don't really discuss, we don't really discuss us getting back together (mm-hm) or our, our relationship. It's just more of a general life, you know, whenever she has a problem, I try and help, whenever I have a problem, she tries to help. It really feels more like a, you know, a friendship right now. I think we're both trying to avoid, um, talking about our relationship. (Sure) I know for me, it's because I don't want to hear the whole thing of, let's get together, let's not, da da da da da.

The category of "friends" seems to be a way for contingent spouses to maintain contact with their estranged spouse without fear of censure from either the spouse or the audience hearing the story. Drew uses this category in typical fashion above, drawing from a working knowledge of "what friends do" for one another; it is not grasping or desperate

for them to continue taking problems to one another. He also uses the category of friends, somewhat atypically, to explain ongoing sexual contact during the separation:

> Um, well that's the interesting part, is that we, we took, we try to define it not so much as having sex as husband and wife, but just a couple of friends who just needed to have some sexual release. Because we were trying to work on the friendship. (Right) But then, we tried this, I guess about three months into the uh, the separation. And we had sex several times, and then she decided that because we were having sex, it felt, she was having feelings. (Okay) In other words, more than just a friend and stop that right now.

This is an unusual rhetorical use of "friends." Often, when someone wants to describe a relationship that is assumed to be sexual but is not, they will use the phrase "just friends." Here, Drew uses a version of this same phrase, "just a couple of friends," to describe a relationship that is sexual but not necessarily sexually committed. For Janice, the categories of sexual intimate and friends do not coincide well; her feelings follow her sexual behavior, and since she has chosen not to be "lovers," the sexual intimacy was ended.

One participant, Zack, told me of an unusual situation that made physical proximity to his wife Edith irrelevant in their separation. Had she not left him, she still would have been "gone." As I have detailed in chapter four, Edith has a serious mental illness that prevents them from maintaining any sort of meaningful communication or emotional intimacy:

> I don't know if it's ah . . feeling *married* but it's . . um . . . realizing our connection with each other. It's it's when um . . we're with our *children*. Or when um, we're looking at pictures of our children, or we hear from one of our children, um, those are the times that, that we can *share*. And those times are also difficult to share, because . . she, can't stop talking. Ah; . . . so there are not many times that, that we can share any more. She

> . . . doesn't seem to be able to process what is happening at a . . in a normal way so, she, she's there but she's not there.

Many of the rules that seem to pertain to the narrative construction of the contingent spouse are suspended in this case. Zack cannot describe efforts to maintain contact because they would be meaningless. Nor can he hide his separation, or minimize the telling of marital difficulties. Life with Edith is a nightmare, and being physically separated from her is a relief.

But, Zack still claims the contingent spouse self in two powerful ways. First, he locates the cause of his separation in his wife's illness, as I have detailed earlier in this dissertation. During the long span of his marriage when Edith was not well, their marriage was fine. Secondly, by continually bringing up Edith's refusal to take medication as the key element in her remaining ill, Zack sets up a way that his relationship could reasonably be expected to return to normal. Like other contingent spouses, Zack alludes to wanting his wife back. This response, in answer to my question "what is your preferred outcome of separation," suggests that medication that works would bring his wife back and thus would effectively end the reason for separation:

> Ah . . my preferred outcome would be for her to ah . . take, ah . . medication that . . a psychiatrist, ah . . . thinks would be appropriate for her. And um, if that one did not work, to try a different one because there are *quite* a few . . um, *different* medications for her condition, that have been discovered *recently*. And, um, if one of them is not the best for her, perhaps another one . . would be better.

The Enduring Spouse

As Catherine Kohler Riessman has noted, divorcing people face the "teller's problem" of explaining why the marriage broke up: "how does a teller convince a listener

who was not there that a marriage was seriously troubled, and that he or she was justified in leaving it?" (1990 p. 74) Did one leave too easily, too soon, too capriciously? One manner that separated persons manage the potential stigma of their status is by claiming what I call the "enduring spouse" self. In this construction, separated persons story backward into the marriage or separation to establish that they nobly endured miserable circumstances for a length of time without leaving or seriously punishing the spouse. This is more than complaining about one's spouse, or trying to claim the moral high ground of less objectionable partner. Through establishing this self, separated narrators can say to an audience, "see, if I wanted to leave for no good reason, or if I wanted to punish my spouse, I would have done it here, here, or here – but I didn't because that's not who I am." Initiators of separation tend to invoke this self to support their reasons for leaving, while both initiators and partners may use the enduring spouse construction to show how the circumstances of separation favor their spouse.

Enduring spouses put up with their mate's bad behavior in ways that at first seem naive. For example, Eve, who is three years away from retirement age and married to Kevin, a "con man" who has been "in and out of jail" much of his adult life, has become financially ruined by Kevin's schemes. At one point Kevin decided to purchase a farm, which he then ran into the ground after incurring approximately half of a million dollars' worth of debt. Even after she realized that the business was failing, Eve still agreed to Kevin's plan to move a large house to their new property:

> Eve: Well, um, we had to have other people, it was just managerial problems (Mm) and uh see, it was just a pipe dream. (Wow, a very expensive one) But in the midst of that, of going out to the farm, we moved a twelve room very old house from um, [name of road] you know

> where [name of local business on that road]? (Yes) Um, we were on a five-acre thing there with this old house that had belonged to his parents. In fact they had owned forty acres, probably on both sides of that road (Mm) for a long, long time back into the early fifties. In fact, when it was dirt road they lived back there and had a dairy. (Wow) But uh, he got the house nobody else wanted, so uh, we invest another chunk money to move the house back.
>
> Erica: So you physically moved the house? (Mm-hm, Mm-hm) Wow.
>
> Eve: Mm-hm. Seven miles out to where this farm was. SO there was that debt as well. (Mm-hm) Um, in permits galore, we had to put down septic tanks and put a roof, we took the roof off of it in order to get it under the interstate. (Mm) Put a new roof back on, new foundation, all this, and it has never been completed. And that was in eighty-six.

In this narrative, Eve shows Kevin as selfish and unrealistic. The house in question is the house that "he got," but was paid for with money that "we invest[ed]" to finance the complicated move. By mentioning that this move occurred in eighty-six and has "never been completed," Eve suggests that she has had ample reasons to be angry and punishing with Kevin. A fortune had been wasted needlessly.

Eve tells of how she continues to support her ne'er-do-well husband, not in spite of but *because of* this pattern of spending. In this passage, she hints at the unfairness of her circumstances:

> No. (No) I don't love him as a lover. (Mm-hm) He's more like the child that wouldn't go on and leave home. (Oh) And those feelings, he has tromped on me so long. And he thinks he's the one that's abused. He's been talking to [local resource center for battered spouses] to make me take care of him, because I don't give him enough money. I cannot give him money because he won't buy groceries. So I have to do his shopping, and take it to him.

Kevin takes and takes from Eve, as though he were a "child," and she wishes he would become independent. She is forced to take care of him, which is mentioned here as being

insulting: "he thinks he's the one that's abused." Ironically, Kevin has lied to a local legal agency that covers marital cases for indigent clients. I found out prior to the interview but during the course of this research that due to being short staffed, the agency had stopped taking cases unless the person was being abused by their estranged spouse. Kevin has reported Eve as abusive because she "won't feed him," and so Eve has to keep Kevin supplied with groceries. For Eve, it is more of the same economic ruin that she experienced earlier while married to Kevin. If you give Kevin money for a stated purpose, he will spend the money and not fulfil the purpose. Because of this pattern of behavior, Eve not only has to pay for Kevin's groceries but must also be the one to pick them out at the supermarket.

Laurie also tells of financial mismanagement by her estranged spouse Steve. Laurie had never loved Steve, never felt "really" married, as I have described in chapter four. She felt cheated of emotional intimacy. After her separation, she found out that she had been cheated financially as well:

> . . . At the time of our *divorce* apparently I was the part *owner* of or responsible for approximately sixteen thousand dollars' worth of debt. Incurred on credit, by my husband. That's how they figured it, was fifty percent of the debt. (I: Wow.) You know, um, in the divorce . . . *hearing*, you know, he, he got the *car*, I didn't. You know, there, there had been two cars and I *lost* mine in, because of the whole, he wouldn't transfer, you know, return my phone calls so I could get a tag put on it. The title was never in my name. You know, things like this, it, financially was, I got the short end of the stick. In the arrangement. (I: Right) And financially speaking, he's done very well.

Laurie's short narrative about the financial perils of separation is dripping with irony. She "apparently" is the "*owner*" of debt, although she is specifically *not* an owner of a car, or of good credit, as the result of Steve's behavior while they were separated. Steve ran up

credit cards and the court is considering her to be liable for half of their "joint" purchases. Legally, it does not matter that they were estranged at the time of the purchases.

Stories used in the construction of the enduring spouse identity must be sufficiently grim to elicit sympathy for the speaker without arousing suspicions of pettiness. When separated people spill the "dirt" about their spouses, they generally go all out. In contrast, lesser stories must be qualified and the partner's role in trouble magnified to make a convincing point. Zack uses a story of a late dinner as an example of what he has had to put up with from his wife, and the story almost fails:

> And um, the way that she . . *acted*, um *encouraged* me towards the direction of divorce. For example, um, we were going to eat out, we did eat out together . . Saturday night. Well . . I like to eat at six, but we had, my brother and I had eaten lunch late so . . . we, we set a time of seven when I would pick them up. But my wife . . was *no*where *near* getting dressed, and she . . fooled around and, it seemed like she was enjoying controlling the situation, because she was blockading our schedule. We couldn't *do* anything until she got dressed. Um. Finally, ah, she fooled around and fooled around and we didn't, we didn't go to supper till *eight* o'clock instead of seven o'clock. And I told her, I have medication that is supposed to be taken with a meal . . and I'm supposed to, to take it around the same time every *day*.

Zack's narration does not fulfill the dramatic tension that he sets up in asserting that "the way that she . . *acted*, um *encouraged*" him to choose divorce. This emphasis suggests that heinous examples of cruelty or neglect will follow. Instead, Zack describes being late for dinner. When he fleshes out his story, he tells that "I like to eat at six" but that a late dinner had given him some flexibility so he was able to pick up his guests at seven. Zack is in danger of seeming petty and impatient in this narrative, and if he does it will not suit his purposes of convincing an audience that his wife's regularly bad behavior is pushing him to divorce her. Zack also chooses an unfortunate focus for his complaint. The lament

that "she takes forever to get ready to go out" is almost a meta-narrative of gendered dating, and as such does not infer reasonable grounds for divorce.

He redeems his narrative somewhat at the end of the telling, by quoting himself telling his wife that his fussiness over eating times is medically based. By "reading" his complaint to his wife in this manner, Zack reasserts that he has a reasonable complaint and is not being petty. His wife's self-centeredness has the potential to cause him health problems. Still, the storyline here seems oddly truncated, with a sense of "is that all there is?" Later in his account, Zack returns to this same night in exemplifying his wife's typical behavior, and extends the telling to action at the restaurant. Edith did not get completely dressed at home while she was taking so long to get ready. Instead she went out in a slip but carrying her skirt, and walked through the restaurant in her lingerie to the restroom to finish getting dressed.

A narrator can use stories of tiny troubles to great effect when the goal is to illustrate the spouse's pettiness. Here, Brian relates several episodes in his marriage that illustrate the "ridiculous things" that he and his wife would fight over:

> And so after that first three months of our marriage was absolutely miserable. We would argue all the time. What - we argued, I put peanut butter with a spoon. She spreads it with a knife. And we argued for a week and a half over that ridiculous thing. And it wasn't so, it, it developed into um, just that we weren't talking. Because I could go two weeks without talking to her. Um, because I could completely shut down. So those first three months would be my first chapter that um, you know, everyone talks about how its such a, you know, immense bliss, and this and that. And we had the house, my mother had bought a house from [name of company] and we moved in, it was fully furnished as a gift to us, um, and all we had to do was pay a mortgage of five-forty-seven. And that was nothing for a three-bedroom two-bath home. And we had the dog, and we had the cat, and I couldn't stand the cat, and we argued for another three months over the cat. Because I was allergic to cats, and she insisted on

> getting the cat. But if she knew I was, I mean I was really allergic to cats. I would swell up, and, and she would just bring the cat, and I said, "Okay, we can have the cat, just don't bring the cat in the bedroom." Every night, she would bring the cat into bed with us.

By relaying this story in this manner, Brian accomplishes two goals. First, he shows himself to be a reasonable person. He acknowledges that it is stupid to fight about peanut butter, and admits his role in the ongoing conflict. He is also a flexible person, willing to allow his wife to keep a cat even though he is "really" allergic to them and "would swell up" if cats were near. His original objection to the cat, which lasted three months, was tabled when he agreed to put up with the cat so long as it was not in the bedroom. In each instance, Linda abuses Brian's good nature. Brian's positive self in construction plays directly off of the negative construction of his wife here. Linda is a vindictive woman who knowingly causes her husband discomfort. She brings the cat in bed with her "every night," which caused Brian to go sleep on the couch. The story continues as Brian explains that she would then become angry at him for sleeping on the couch. This cycle of cause and reaction illustrates that Brian is married to a woman who becomes angry over problems of her own causing. Brian, on the other hand, does what he can to be decent in difficult circumstances.

The Compassionate Ex

While the enduring spouse self requires that narrators recount trials and tribulations from the relationship, the compassionate ex self takes the opposite tack. For a speaker to claim this separation identity, he or she has to be willing to let go of recrimination. The compassionate ex is a self that hinges on the idea that if ongoing contact is either necessary or desired it may as well be as pleasant as possible. Narrators

who construct the compassionate ex self do so by being generous in their assessment of the estranged spouse's good qualities, by using evasive language or structure when speaking about subjects of potential contention, and by speaking against the discourse of divorce. The genuineness of the sentiments used in construction of this separated self varies widely, but is only relevant as an additional focus for analysis.

Some sins are harder to treat lightly than others. In this next passage, Yvonne characterizes Gerald's having fallen in love with another woman during the marriage. Earlier in her account, she had described her life at this point as "*horribly* hard," and described feeling "*totally* off-balance all the time." Surprisingly, she does not place blame with Gerald for his having fallen in love with another:

> Erica: Okay, at any point during your separation did you date?
>
> Yvonne: No.
>
> Erica: No? Did your spouse date?
>
> Yvonne: Ah, you can't, no, not really date, I mean he already had this person that he was interested in. And so, he spent time with her but it wasn't like you would say a 'date', they just spent time together.
>
> Erica: So nothing like, formal, I guess.
>
> Yvonne: No, not at all. Nothing planned. They ju-, it was actually a friendship that just grew, as *our* relationship . . . grew . . apart, he had a friendship that grew closer.

This secondary relationship which came between Gerald and Yvonne is characterized here as a natural occurrence. It began as a "friendship" and "grew" to replace the emotional closeness being lost in the marriage. By phrasing her mate's emotional defection in this way, Yvonne separates the two occurrences. One relationship waned, while another

increased on a parallel track; there is no sense of the new love having supplanted marital affection. Yvonne does not draw upon the readily available and condemning discourse of "other woman" or "unfaithful husband" at this or any other point in her account.

According to Yvonne, she and Gerald did not come to dislike one another during the process of breaking up, nor did they each try to make the other look bad. Both of these emotionally mature stances are highly unusual, and contradict Vaughan's (1986) findings about the process of uncoupling. The pair had determined to maintain a friendship, and so took this into account when telling family and friends about their final decision:

> And so, we just, um, started calling family and close friends. And just saying that he and I had, you know, worked . . to the point where, I needed to . . have time away. We made it soft, softened it. Neither one of us wanted the other one to be injured. We didn't want . . my family, looking badly at him or his family looking bad at me, we didn't want any of that, we wanted to, we *knew* . . at the beginning, not the beginning, we knew later on, we wanted to end as . . good friends.

Sara would also prefer to remain on friendly terms with her ex-husband Norman, as they have two children together. She insists that he see the children regularly, and so avoiding him is not an option. It is difficult for the two of them to change the nature of their relationship, however, because Norman's girlfriend Alicia does not like Sara:

> I would like for us to remain on *very* good terms, and I always write that to him when he gets . . *snippy* with me, which he does often. But he's always been like that so it's no different. But you know, I say, look, I've forgiven both of you, there's no reason particularly for the kids, because of the kids, that *all* of us can't be civil to one another. And although he can be businesslike civil to me, Alicia is in no way ready. But I think she's *embarrassed* deep down because . . she and I *were* friends, I used to give her money, I used to do just different things for her. That Norman didn't know about, and I can't believe after all those years . . . that she would say

> she *hates* me, I know she says she does now, she says I'm spoiled, um, who knows what else.

Sara's narrative contains several of the main elements of the construction of the compassionate ex, yet it is much less rhetorically successful than was Yvonne's. Although Sara insists that she wants to remain on "*very* good terms" with her Norman, and that she and Norman and Alicia can all be civil with one another, she does so in such a way that her linguistic choices undermine her stated purpose. Like Yvonne, Sara suggests that she does not hold her husband's choosing another woman against him. However, unlike Yvonne, Sara "forgives" her husband and Alicia. This is arguably a noble and understandable sentiment, but in this narrative it serves to remind that there is something that needs to be forgiven. Sara also describes Alicia as "embarrassed," and then goes on to enumerate several reasons why Alicia might have to be embarrassed for having slept with Norman ("she and I were friends, I used to give her money").

Throughout her account, Sara expresses thanks to Norman for having left her. She mentions that things around the house are much easier with him gone:

> Um, I realized that as hard as that week was, it was probably the *best* thing my husband could have done, because he's not a family person (I: Mm hm) and there was always friction in the house with him here, either between he and I, or between the kids and him.

She regularly divides her life with Norman into almost Parsonian complementary roles. Her focus, she explains, was on her children, while Norman's was on his business. She is generous in her assessment of her former husband in this one area, finance, and admits he is a genius at making and investing money. Norman is not provided space in Sara's account as a good father, or a loving husband. Family emotions are Sara's area alone.

Rhetorically speaking, Sara's establishment of the compassionate ex is weak – but perhaps by design. Sara seems to have mastered the back-handed complement in her narrative. In this next passage, Sara constructs self against the foil of typical divorcing women:

> I knew I needed to get a lawyer because I didn't know the first thing, and I told my lawyer, look I've . . I'm not out to . . be vindictive towards my husband, I said, I love him, I will always love him. I will never live with him, I will never be married to him, but I mean some women hate their husbands when they go through a divorce. I don't hate mine, because I think he did me the biggest favor. I wish him well. I love his family, I care for him a great deal. But not, not for marriage. Um, I got a lawyer, I said look, I don't want to hurt him, I just want . . equitable, and the way my husband did it, he's, he's so smart. We didn't have any um, liabilities. We had paid stuff off long ago. But he . . took some of his money and he . . put it into financial things, puts, calls, leaps, straddles, I don't know what it is. And he made it look like he had, um, liabilities. With a *huge* chunk of money. And I know that my husband would *not* do anything to risk the money, so when it comes to an equitable distribution it was *not* fifty-fifty. It was more . . maybe sixty-six, thirty-three. But I still ended up with a respectable amount, so I said I'm not going to argue with him.

This narrative is at cross purposes. Sara tells me that her husband is "so smart," and that she "cares for him a great deal." Her generous description is then marred by the sense that her husband is also cheap and sneaky. He does something that she does not understand with his money ("leaps, straddles, I don't know what it is") and obscures his net worth before the distribution of assets is settled.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Spouses have expectations of one another as partners, and the concepts of 'wife' and 'husband' as culturally defined and personally understood inform these expectations. Similarly, ex-spouses have a means for framing their interaction – if children are present from the marriage, then they are co-parents and must continue to interact on that basis, but the spousal tie with all that it implies is severed. However, when spouses are separated but not yet divorced, the implicit guidelines for interaction are up for negotiation, and subject to uncertainties and conflicting expectations.

Even the most basic interactions cannot be taken for granted. Should spouses talk on the phone, and if so, how often? Should they see one another socially? Privately? What about physical affection and sexual contact, either with one another or with others? Is the separated person identifying as 'mostly married' or 'mostly divorced' -- and does this identification change dependent upon context? Each of these questions has at its center the two main questions that I have addressed in this dissertation: how do people in different circumstances understand their experience of marital separation, and how does this understanding inform their ongoing production of identity? My goal stands in contrast to work by other qualitative researchers who study marital disruption. Earlier research on

this topic either ignored the individual experience of the separation process, or treated separated persons as "self-less" individuals lost between two statuses.

I have found that this is not the case. People who are separated do not table their efforts at constructing a biographically informed and locally produced self. In fact they continually draw from their own personal experiences and cultural expectations in constructing the self through talk.

My original expectation that the same respondent may, at turns in his or her narrative, present self as married, separated, or ex-spouse, contingent upon context or topic under consideration turned out to be an oversimplification. Separated persons do not merely choose to "do" marriage or not or something in between. Each person who goes through separation will construct a unique and multi-layered self to better understand – and convey to others – the many nuances of their separation experience. Examining the distinctly personal separated self requires close analysis of a single case, taking into account not only the content of what is being said but also the language that the speaker uses and the cultural referents that surface in the account.

One way that narrators use to construct a separated self is to choose from among readily available separation selves, or general types of selves that allow the narrator to place themselves, their estranged spouse, and the nature of the marriage within a rhetorical context. Based on ten transcribed interviews with persons who had gone through separation from a spouse, each comprising up to forty-five separate chunks of narrative, I have found be five basic available selves that can be readily drawn upon by separated

people: the never married spouse, the still married spouse, the contingent spouse, the enduring spouse, and the compassionate ex.

My findings do not mean, however, that *every* separated person must fall into one of these categories of identity, nor can I claim to have mined the separated identity down to its very component parts. For the purposes of illustration across cases, it is necessary to construct broader, more general categories; I have done so with the sample that I had. A larger sample would likely have provided "fleshing out" for these categories, but I do not believe that more participants would have invalidated these findings. I believe that most separated individuals, when relating their experiences within a storied format, will draw upon one or more of these basic identity categories in relaying to their audience the "self" that they wish to have known. Still, validity and reliability in the traditional – and heavily quantitative – sense cannot be fully safeguarded here. No two speakers will draw upon any given category in the same way, so exact replication is impossible. Nor can my more general categories be combined into a predictable series of sedimentary "selves." The strategies used by each speaker in combining these basic selves with personal biographical details makes any type of generalization at this secondary level extremely problematic. There is no straightforward relationship between an account and a given self that can be taken out of the context of the individual talk at hand.

This shifting nature of self during marital separation, I believe, speaks to broader theoretical issues regarding the concept of selfhood. It is difficult to pin down "self," whether for rhetorical or operational purposes, when the meaning of this term is contested. The sense of self that I have employed in this study, that of a constantly

produced and revised sense of identity which is subject to context and swayed by interaction, is not necessarily the same "self" that other researchers might use, nor is it the commonly understood definition used by many people in everyday talk about "who I am." I draw heavily upon the "self" employed by Holstein and Gubrium (2000), which sets the concept of individual identity free in a field of numerous potential selves, managed through discourse and honed through interpretive practice. Laying bare the layered aspects of this self requires the researcher to separate what is being said from the mechanics of the telling, suspending the contextual links of narrative to expose how the interplay produces meaning. Everything then becomes grist for the mill: how stories are framed, how event tales are linked together, how different "storied" moments slip one into another to give body to a larger account. Biographical particulars also inform telling, as the "going concerns" of the self such as race, gender, and class vie for primacy in storytelling context (ibid., p. 106).

New Directions

It is this complexity of identity which surprised me most during the course of conducting my research. Although in concept I had long argued for the constructed self, and I had believed that the self was mutable and situation-dependent, I had not realized the intricate juggling act that goes on during interaction when the perceived self is not readily socially apparent. This is both a methodological and a theoretical complication. If the self is continually produced, and is subject to a myriad of individually located concerns and particulars, then there is no way to locate "the" self, either on an individual or aggregate level. The best that can be hoped for is a glimpse of self in the moment, or the self that is

exhibited within the context of the research interaction. More deterministic social researchers might argue that, on this basis, my research fails the "so what" criterion: if the self that I am able to see and tell my reader about is not "the" self that an individual possesses, and if my typology of selves is not encompassing of all possible permutations, then what is the point in this work?

It is precisely this nature of self that makes my work, and other messy forays into the realm of personal identity, critical to understanding of the everyday social world. If self is understood as a mutable and reflexive property invoked by the individual through talk, rather than as a fixed essence waiting to be glimpsed by an astute observer, then it becomes clear that social interaction is not merely a bid to convey information or exert influence. In interaction, people are not only understanding who they are dealing with in the other party, but also who *they themselves* must be in order to maximize the goal at hand. Taken further, this becomes an intricate dance of presentation, as Holstein and Gubrium (2000) have argued. As perception of the other shifts, the self presented shifts accordingly, which in turn encourages a collaborative adjustment by the other party, and so the negotiations continue. From this stance, the selves in interaction are continually produced and bolstered, edited, or discarded during interaction.

This has exciting and troubling implications for both the study of marital discord and the study of self. At the extreme, yet logical, conclusion, all selves from this standpoint are inherently liminal. Although my subjects are in a liminal, or normless and uncertain, marital status, and therefore have fewer cultural scripts to draw from in the construction of self, there is no "final" self available to any of us. The sociological study

of the presentation of self is based on several presuppositions. First, there is no unified "self" that is at the root of personal identity. All selves are contingent, and as such subject to application and revision. Secondly, the production of self is an ongoing social process that takes into account local culture, social norms, and biographical material at hand. Based on these suppositions, sociologists who take an interest in the self look for identity markers, often in the accounts of research participants. People enact self in talk. In telling stories of experiences place themselves as characters in relation to the other people and events in these stories.

It is my hope that researchers who focus on marital disruption will pay closer attention to the selves produced by those who are experiencing the disruption. I offer three main questions for consideration by family sociologists and practitioners:

1. Might individual experiences of identity and family disruption might be storied within the context of family history? Although this was not my focus, as I came to realize how many different characters a narrator must position to find him- or herself in a separation account I wondered how much the family of origin had influenced concepts of "wife," "mother," "husband," "father," "infidelity," and so on. At times my participants touched on this intergenerational influence, as when Eve told of her mother's having to "wear the pants" in the family during World War II. Unfortunately, I did not think to ask about family stories told about hard times or marital roles. In Elizabeth Stone's wonderful book *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us* (1988), she describes how the stories that children grow up with come to affect their definition of self and their understanding of the world. I would argue that these stories do more than just

provide character role sketches such as "the obedient one" or "the sickly one," or inspire ways of looking at the world. Stories are so important that they form a mythic field against which our understanding of life is continually reinforced. If my mother talks of her own mother's experiences as a wife, or of her own fear during pregnancy, this may affect how I view not only marriage and pregnancy but how I conceptualize wife and mother. It is likely that children do not get to hear detailed stories of the goings on in their parents' marriages. Still, small recollections of everyday life can become part of a system for meaning-making, and the influence of family "divorce culture" should not be ignored.

2. What types of stories do couples tell one another at different points in the relationship? How are subtle changes in the content and form of stories told linked to couples' perceptions of the relationship, their partner, and themselves as spouse?

3. Can family therapy and family sociology form a partnership to better understand the separated self? Many of my participants mentioned therapy, either in terms of sessions they or their spouse had been to or of requiring a spouse to attend therapy. How do visits to therapists affect a patient's sense of their marriage and spouse? Perhaps more importantly, in a practical sense, are the definitions used by the spouses for self and each other mutual, and does the therapeutic intervention recognize discrepancies where and when they arise?

In my future research I also hope to be able to apply what I have learned in this work to the study of more general forms of human relationships. Although marriage is a contractually bound relationship that has more clearly defined parameters than do many other relationship forms, it is likely that there is a similar process that occurs during the

flux and ebb of human pairings of all sorts. Friends who are very close for some time and then drift apart, parents and children who must renegotiate their interactions after the children are adults, and "work friends" who meet on the job but have to renegotiate their relationship when one or both change workplaces are all dyads that may experience a sort of on-again, off-again flavor to the nominal relationship. For instance, I will always be my mother's daughter, but there are circumstances in which I feel more like my mother's child (and sometimes this feeling is less welcome than other times). Within every interaction is a complex and culturally constrained set of expectations, responsibilities, and traits which may not be explicitly stated or even understood by participants, but which factor into interaction nevertheless.

Limitations

If I were to conduct this same research a second time, I would make special effort to find more male participants. I have very few men in this current sample, which makes it difficult for me to adequately address the many issues of gender that surface in narratives of marital disruption. My sample is similarly limited by race; almost all of my participants are white women. Although I am not trying to establish generalizable findings that can be applied to "all" separating persons, or even to all white women experiencing separation, it is possible that my search for greater understanding of the self during separation is hampered by this circumstance. As narrators draw from their own lived experiences as well as the cultural and discursive contexts that are available to them in making their accounts, it is reasonable to assume that race and ethnicity may be relevant to the narrative study of this subject.

I have purposefully not made strong assertions related to either race or gender because of this shortcoming in my sample, but the data that I have suggests that further work in this area will lead to a more detailed picture of marital identity. Two specific instances lead me to believe that my predominantly white and female sample is especially problematic. First, in every instance where a narrator strongly claimed that their spouse was "crazy," either officially diagnosed or colloquially understood, the teller was male. This characterization brings up the question of whether the cultural stereotype of woman as emotional, hysterical, and unpredictable is being used as a resource in these tales. without a larger number of men in my sample, however, I am not comfortable making the assertion that this rhetorical device is being used. It is likely that with a larger sample of men I would notice more such gendered devices, and be able to provide yet another layer in the construction of the separated identity. There are differing cultural pressures placed on men and women related to marriage and marriagability. For instance, there is no stigmatizing male corollary to "old maid," men remain able to reproduce for decades longer than do most women, and beauty standards are kinder to men than women as both groups age. Such discrepancies likely contribute to conceptions of the self during and after marital breakdown. Due to my sample characteristics, this is a factor that I have not been able to adequately address here.

The second instance that underscores my need for a more heterogenous sample is the tape recorded interview that took place in an outdoor café. This participant, an Indian man, spoke quietly but with great eloquence about the tangled complications involved in being separated from a spouse within his culture. His family in India is not aware that the

marriage has broken apart – nor, from what I was able to tell, did he intend at that time to inform them. He also spoke of the competing ideas of what marriage means and what spousal roles should entail from both an Indian and an American perspective. Because of the poor tape quality, I was not able to transcribe even fragments of our talk, as the average sound loss was every second or third word. The details that I have briefly related here were not included in analysis as I was unable to attend to the linguistic and contextual ways in which he relayed the information to me. However, from my existing field notes it is clear that the cultural pressures felt by this participant strongly informed his understanding of what marriage should be, how his marriage actually was, and what type of person he would be seen as once it was known he was separated. I expect that, to a greater or lesser extent, the cultural context of social life for nonwhite participants will add a critical dimension to this issue, affecting both their personal definitions of "self" and "spouse" and influencing the reactions that they receive from family and friends when their separation becomes public.

I am of two minds when considering how my original sample parameters were loosened during the recruiting process. On one hand, I have argued that most sociological literature that addresses separation does so only tangentially, and that the combined measure of marital disruption impossibly tangles the separation experience from that of divorce. On the other hand, I have included the narratives of divorced participants in this study, and have used their retrospective accounts to illustrate the "separated self" even though they are no longer separated. I would make the distinction that this work is focused on the production of meaning by participants, rather than the meaning "found"

through the use of a closed-ended questionnaire. As such, problems of interpretation and recall are largely irrelevant. There is no static "I" that can be immediately understood. (Mead, 1934). Rather, all narration is a retrospective telling that stories a sense of self into being:

> We never catch ourselves in the act of *becoming selves*. We are always out of sync with our selves, always lagging behind, always trying to catch up retrospectively, for the self we seek turns out to be a self *in process*. (Eakin, 1999 p. 39-40, emphasis in the original)

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent
(individual interview)
Protocol Title: Marital Separation: Experience and Identity Work

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to examine marital separation as it is experienced and understood by separated persons.

What you will be asked to do in this study:

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview. I will ask you a series of questions regarding your everyday experiences of marital separation. I will also ask you some basic identifying questions, such as your age, how long you have been married, and whether you have children.

Time required:

Between 60 and 90 minutes.

Risks and Benefits:

I do not anticipate any risk or benefit to you as a result of this research.

Compensation:

No compensation, monetary or otherwise, will be provided to you as a participant.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your responses will be audio-taped. During transcription (when audio-tape is typed like a script) your name will be replaced with a code number and any specific identifying descriptions or others' names will be omitted or made more general. At this point in the research process, your basic demographic data (age, length of marriage, children) will be encoded into a series of numbers that will hide the nature of this data and that will be seen only by me. Your number code will be placed at the top of your transcript. An example of this coding is: 001290.603.110205, a number string which includes participant ID number, age, presence of/ages of children, and length of marriage. Original audiotapes will be kept for three years after your participation. The list of codes linking your information on transcript to your interview on tape will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. At the end of the three years, both this list and your audio-taped interview will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report resulting from this research.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Right to not answer questions:

You may refuse to answer any question I ask you. You do not need to have or to provide a reason for this refusal, and there will be no penalty for this refusal.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Erica Owens, Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, 3219 Turlington Hall, 392-0265; e-mail EAOwens7@cs.com

Felix M. Berardo, Department of Sociology, 3219 Turlington Hall; 392-0265 x 228

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in this study:

UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant _____ Date_____

Investigator_____ Date_____

APPENDIX B
RECRUITING FLIER

Are you separated from your spouse?

I am a UF Doctoral student in family sociology, and I would like to speak with you regarding your experiences. You do not need to be legally separated from your spouse to be a participant.

I will be conducting both interviews and focus groups in my research. I offer no monetary compensation for your participation, but welcome the chance to listen to whatever experiences of separation that you choose to share with me.

The interview process is not meant to be used as therapy or counseling or as an adjunct to counseling; any therapy or other intervention that you are participating in should be considered separate from participation in this study.

If you are interested in either an individual interview or group discussion on marital separation, please call (352) 392-0265 extension 146 for further information.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1.Name: _____

2. Age: _____

3. How long have you been married? _____

4. Is this your first marriage? If not, how many times have you been married previously?

5. Is this your first separation from this spouse? If not, how many times have you separated from this spouse in the past?

6. How long have you been separated from your spouse? Did you or your spouse make the decision to separate?

7. Are you cohabiting (living together) with your spouse currently? With someone other than your spouse?

8. Are/were there children living in the marital home? If so, how many and what ages?

9. What is your highest level of education completed?

10. Are you employed currently? If so, what type of work do you do? Is this work full or part time?

11. Are you dating or romantically involved currently with someone other than your spouse?

12. Is your marital separation public? Who knows and who does not know?

13. How do you tell/make public about your separation to/what is the reaction of:
    - –adult family members
    - –children
    - –close friends
    - –persons at work/school
    - –acquaintances

Alternately, how and when do you conceal your separated status with these persons?

14. If you were describing the story of your separation, how would you divide the experience into chapters? What would be the main content of each chapter?

15. Are there times when you feel more 'married' than others? More 'separated' than others?

16. If you had a friend who confided that he or she was thinking about separating from their spouse, what advice would you give them?

17. Describe any formal or informal rules that you and/or your spouse have come up with regarding your separation.

18. How often do you see your former spouse? Please describe a typical interaction.

19. What do you see as the main purpose of your separation?

20. What do you see as the probable outcome of this separation? What would be your preferred outcome of this separation?

21. Describe your home before and after marital separation.

22. When did you stop doing marital things? Are you still involved in family activities/how?

23. What economic impacts of separation have you experienced?

24. Suppose you had a friend who was separated, and this friend was engaging in behavior that you personally consider 'inappropriate' for a separated person. What would your friend be doing to earn your disapproval?

25. Suppose you had another friend who was also separated, and this friend was behaving appropriately or adjusting extremely well to separation in your opinion. What would this friend be doing that would earn him or her this appraisal from you?

26. Suppose you could make three requests for the purposes of making your separation experience easier. Assuming that you could not request reunion with your partner, what requests would you make and from whom?

27. Is there anything that I have forgotten to ask about that you would like to mention or discuss?

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erica Ann Owens was born and raised in the state of Florida. She earned a Bachelor of Arts with a major in English from the University of Florida in 1991. Her graduate degrees in sociology, also earned at the University of Florida, were earned in 1998 (Master of Arts) and 2002 (Doctor of Philosophy). She is relocating to the state of Wisconsin for professional reasons with her husband and two children in the fall of 2002, and is looking forward to her first white Christmas.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Felix M. Berardo, Chair
Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Hernán Vera
Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Jaber F. Gubrium
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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Joe R. Feagin
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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